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John Keats

JOHN KEATS

A LITERARY BIOGRAPHY BY

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TO ONE BY MY DESK

PREFACE

A TRADITION *may be established about a man of lasting genius, but the final word can never be said. Some warrant like this must be offered in excuse by the biographer who trespasses upon the field which Lord Houghton, Mr. Forman and Mr. Colvin have occupied and held with so much distinction. They have labored with the documents and collated the facts which give scholarly assurance to our estimate of Keats. Even judicial opinion must follow, more or less, the critical tradition which they have established. A later biographer therefore must acknowledge his great debt to them before he ventures to place his memorial stone upon the foundations of the builders.*

It is possible for biography, sometimes, to attain the dramatic vitality of fiction. Modern scholarship demands, of course, that there shall be no transgressions against the truth. In this book I have endeavored to conceive of Keats as the protagonist of a domestic drama, coming upon a stage of shifting scenes, as in the old chronicle-

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histories, — coming, playing his part, and passing tragically under the blight. I have tried to select the significant moments, to reproduce the authentic local color of his daily life and to make him live, in a world of good cheer and vexation, as a vivid reality. Thus we may, in imagination, see the poet at work and best discern the creative intentions of the artist. Incidentally I have discovered or co-ordinated some things which throw new light upon his character and his poetry.

Mr. William Allan Neilson of Harvard University has added a fresh seal to an old comradeship by his good offices as counselor.

A. E. H.

HAVERFORD, PENN.
MAY, 1908.

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JOHN KEATS

JOHN KEATS

OF THE
UNIVERSITY
OF
CALIFORNIA

I

BEFORE WATERLOO AND AFTER

ENGLAND, after Waterloo, was indisputably the foremost nation in Europe. The English navy, English armies, English subsidies had gained for her an increasing prestige among the powers. For twenty years a modern Tamburlaine had wrought his will on the Continent. The globe itself had felt the shocks. At last on the Belgian field an English general had destroyed the last hope of the conqueror and brought his orgy of egotism to a close. It was England who claimed the great captive and bore him away to her lonely rock in the South Atlantic.

The *Laus Deo* echoed through the ancient Abbey. Then there was a jubilee in praise of the victory. When the jubilee was over, the Englishman returned to his mansion, his pipe, and his tankard, to enjoy peace after war. His stolid

organism had been violently shaken; it was still tremulous. He had seen regicides, red terrors, mobocracies in France; a fleet gathered to invade his inviolable island. He had been haunted by the spectres of banded conspirators at home. Often he had been awakened by a nightmare of London in flames. The dread was passing. England and the allies had laid the Corsican ghost, restored monarchy in France, rekindled the aura that invests a king. History was free once more to pursue the even tenor of her way. Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, — these would be recorded, in a footnote, as an aberration of the human brain.

There had been a time when the Englishman listened sympathetically to the plea for the common brotherhood. In the depths of his heart he was generous. He had received Jean-Jacques and given him a pension. He had considered, half interested, half amused, Condorcet's logic about the perfectibility of man. He had permitted discussions about human rights and had even instructed his minister, the younger Pitt, to introduce certain measures of reform. In those days he looked across the Channel and saw with tolerance a starved people rising against an iniquitous government. The Bastille fell; he was

not sorry. With the detachment of a spectator he beheld a political theory pass into a drama of action. He admired the sanity of Mirabeau and his control of the Convention. But when Mirabeau died and the factions took to wrangling and the Mountain on the Left loomed up, vindictive, roaring, the Englishman became uneasy. The political theory ran swiftly into a tragedy of blood; a king's head, then a queen's; then the tumbrils and the drop of the knife; the sack of castles; the flight of refugees; the frenzy of a people impelled, like the Moslems, to extend their wild propaganda unto the ends of the earth. "Ah!" cried the Englishman in a panic, "if I had only heeded the warning of Burke! This anarchy is contagious. I must crush it." So he ordered Pitt to declare war on the French madmen. War followed, and — Napoleon.

The tolerant Englishman hardened into John Bull. No more kindliness; no more charity for the lowly. The doors of his heart were shut and barred. Amid the alarm for his own safety he identified French principles with all humanitarian proposals. He cursed those who advocated any change, and he hunted his kingdom for every viper of reform. Consider the case of Sir Francis Burdett! The land of Magna Charta and of the

Bill of Rights was beset with spies, scoured by press-gangs, patrolled by squads of cavalry. Meanwhile King George was blind, deaf, insane; the Regent — the unspeakable gentleman — was inventing the famous shoe-buckle. Yet the royal sceptre was revered as a sign from heaven; the bishops preached the awful divinity of kings and pronounced anathema on popular rights. John Bull was in the mood of a bigot. Before Waterloo, and long after, he instructed his ministers to enforce rigidly the authority of his Bible, his Crown, and his Constitution. And there was no one whom he hated with more ungovernable rage than a patriot of humanity.

It was in this age of turmoil and intolerance that Destiny, by some caprice, sent unto England an apostle of pagan beauty.

The poets of the Georgian era were stirred, more or less, by the dynamic energy of a world in convulsions. Burns came and went before the panic. The Englishman of his day was open-minded, benevolent. The songs of the hearthstone touched his heart. He listened graciously to the plea for the dignity of the humble. "A man's a man, for a' that." He assented, with reservations, to the claim of the obscure, and per-

mitted the wind of the laws to be tempered to the shorn lambs. Southey, Coleridge, and Wordsworth appeared later, when John Bull was alarmed about the security of his household. Ardent in the sympathy and enthusiasm of youth, these three were at first too radical for parental approval. But with the panic they returned to the fold. Southey, perhaps, came too easily to save his intellectual integrity. Coleridge, with the mystic's irresolution, drifted back consistently on the logic of events. Wordsworth, slow-moving, obstinate, was dragged home by Prudence, the housemaid. Yet they returned, all three, confessing the errors of youth. John Bull took them to church and to court; and they bent the knee and found favor in the sight of the archbishop and the king.

After these — that brace of reprobates, Byron and Shelley. One was a ribald and an arch-rebel. He walked in the counsel of the ungodly and stood in the way of sinners and sat in the seat of the scornful. But when Metternich banded the monarchs into the Holy Alliance to destroy those still unsubdued, he rose up with his invincible "I" and cried "Havoc" upon their holy majesties. The other was a dreamer. His telescopic vision penetrated into the far-off millen-

nium. He waged his war against the despots with the bloodless sword of the spirit and the rainbow banner of hope. John Bull disowned them and drove them into exile. He was well rid of the rogues. They defied his authority, blasphemed his traditions, disturbed his domestic peace.

Last of the brood — an inoffensive waif. John Bull — John Keats. Between the philistine and the æsthete what a natural gulf of unconcern! And yet in the aftermath of the Revolution there was feud.

Keats belongs to the Revolution only by virtue of date. Born just after the Terror, his youth was exactly contemporaneous with the public career of Napoleon. Of any agitation of soul, however, of visible sign of the storm and stress, there is no record. He read a Liberal paper by choice in his boyhood; he had a vague instinct for liberty; he venerated Alfred and Tell and Wallace as heroes of freedom. But during his minority he was politically quiescent. After he became of age the spirit of the times touched him so slightly that the casual outbreaks of feeling are humorously crude. Chance cast him with a group of Liberals. From them he took a little heat. In one sonnet he called the

Regent "a minion of grandeur" and his ministers "a wretched crew." In "Endymion" there is a diatribe against purple vestments and crowns; it goes off like a blunderbuss. Elsewhere one may find some scorn of red-coated soldiers as "pests of humanity." A few such ventings of spleen can be found in his poems; nothing more. The truth is that Keats was as detached from the furor of contemporary England as a hermit among the hills. Indeed, he cannot strictly be called English at all. Mr. Gosse asserts that "no poet save Shakespeare himself is more English than Keats." This assertion is fatuous, unless English be synonymous with universal. Keats drank inspiration from English poets, long dead. He drew a charm from some native landscapes. He had a love for the sea and out-of-doors. But the essence of his genius — the elixir of beauty, concentrated, chemically pure — cannot be claimed as a racial trait. Moreover, his poetry lacks local color. Cowper, Burns, Wordsworth, Tennyson had this local color; but not Keats. He lived in England. He used the English language. Nevertheless, his creative faculty bears no peculiar characteristic of place or time. He was, in the ancient sense, a *maker*. His voice was an oracle, issuing from

some impenetrable sanctuary. Like King Arthur in the legend, he came mysteriously out of the great deep. And when he departed, after his brief sojourn on earth, the great deep received him again. Yet his figure abides among the imperishable memories. He stands apart, lonely, invested with a mythical radiance, revealing unto mortals a portion of the eternal loveliness behind the veil.

II

GENESIS

HEREDITY is a subterranean stream flowing out of its cavern into the light of the sun. The scientific historian, candle in hand, peers into the obscurity; he discerns little and speculates much. Scott has the stamp of the clan. Byron has the wild-rake blood of his forbears. Wordsworth inherited the silence in the starry sky and the sleep among the lonely hills. These men are partially explained. But how could the incarnate soul of Beauty descend from a hostler and a liveryman's daughter in a London stable? There was no strange star in the east. Surely it was one of Nature's feats of legerdemain to compound a being so exquisitely fine amid foul air, stale straw, the reek of oil, leather, animal heat, the needs and easements of dumb beasts, while menials washed coach wheels and jested in Billingsgate. The origin of John Keats is an instance of the personal equation of genius, elusive

of law. Perhaps there may be forces in earth and heaven which are not dreamed of in our philosophy. In ancient times the poet was inspired from above. In this skeptical age, one dare only affirm, lest a belief in divinity should provoke a smile, that Keats puzzles our science. Taine could not fit him into his scheme of *Race*, *Surroundings* and *Epoch*. He craftily ignored him altogether.

The English are zealous to discover in the genealogies of their great men evidences of superior birth. Lowell has had his laugh at Lord Houghton for forcing Keats into "the upper ranks of the middle class." The first biographer, indeed, was wise in his purpose; he knew his public. Even Rossetti, forty years later, clung to euphemism; the poet's father, he declares, was "a natural gentleman." At this date, however, we should cease this hunt for a lack-lustre halo and accept, without shrinking, the bold truth from Charles Cowden Clarke. The father, he tells us, was "a principal servant."

Thomas Keats was born in the Land's End country. He came up to London; a proof of ambition. He worked faithfully and intelligently for John Jennings at the Swan and Hoop livery. He married the master's daughter; he acquired

control of the business. Here, in brief, is the story of the industrious apprentice. The fictions of Hannah More which served so long for the edification of youths can offer nothing more admirable.

Unfortunately, in the prime of life, a fall from a horse occasioned his death and made orphans of his four children. He had been a self-sufficient man. Those who knew him were impressed by his backbone and his reticence.

The mother, one must infer, was very ordinary. Her maternal instinct was strong, but her character was conspicuous for feminine frailties. She was prodigal, pleasure-loving, passionate. She lacked self-sufficiency and spiritual loyalty. In less than a year after the burial of her first husband, she took another. An ordinary woman; a creature of the senses.

The genius of Keats is inexplicable. Some of the personal traits, nevertheless, are clearly heirlooms from the parents. The self-sufficiency, the backbone came from the father; the prodigality, the craving for things of the senses descended from the mother. There was a fine possibility in this commingled inheritance; a possibility of central strength around which might play the caprices of passion.

An accident may have had much to do with the making of his peculiar temperament. The slow process of nature was forced in his birth. An imprudence of the joy-loving mother is said to have been the cause. The child was brought forth two months before the time, and the physiological result was an organism of high-strung nerves. The sensitiveness of Keats was due, in part, very probably, to this premature delivery. In the feverish haste of his entrance into the world there may have developed that hysteria which so frequently shook his poise and drove his emotions from laughter to tears.

One incident gives a vivid picture of his childhood. The mother, ill in bed under the doctor's injunction of quietness; the boy standing guard at the door of her room, sword in hand, a brown-eyed curly-headed midget, ready to repel any intruder. It is too bad that Haydon's version is different. At any rate the fact remains that family affection in Keats was intense.

III

SCHOOLDAYS

ENFIELD lies ten miles north of London. You may reach it by the John Gilpin route. The old school was at the town end, a red Georgian mansion with cherub faces and panels of flowers on the façade. It trained crews of some seventy boys under the discipline of Master Clarke and the fag system. The main building and the classroom were set in a garden. Beyond there was a vista of a pond, a patch of woodland, a sweep of green meadow with cattle, — poetic in the shifting light of sun, mist and moon. After the hubbub of play it was on this world of silence that young Keats fed his unsatisfied feelings. London — how stupid to call him a cockney — never made any impression upon him.

He came to this school *a litel clergeon* in frocks. But he cared naught for his books and he sang no *Alma redemptoris*. He preferred the delight of battle with his peers. The diminutive

youngster was all energy; an unstable compound of daring, defiance, pugnacity, anger, tyranny, generosity, good-will, melancholy, brooding loneliness. He raged sometimes and his comrades had to hold him down. But he won leadership by "terrier courage" and he gained friends by magnanimity. He fought, shook hands cordially and loved best those who fought him. Often passion swept through him like a tropical gust and left him in misery. Grief brought paralysis to his energies; subdued him with mental tortures. When suffering, he shut his lips and hid himself, self-reliant yet helpless.

This temperament, though combative, is not martial. It is a prey to reaction. The mobile emotions, sometimes hysterical, are rather the evidence of imagination in the throes of blind beginnings. Usually they beget mere nerves; occasionally creative power.

Note the next phase. Puberty concentrated the chaos of energies into intellectual ambition. The fighting animal became a scholar. The intensity of his nature developed into a burning fever for knowledge; a lust for conquest in the kingdom of the mind. He rose early; he scanted his athletic exercises; he begrudged the time for meals. He took all the prizes in literature and

THE CLARKE SCHOOL AT ENFIELD

OF THE
VERSITY
OF

voluntarily translated the whole of the Æneid into prose. In the spare hours he read most of the books in the school library and mastered the popular compends of mythology. His schoolmates dubbed him "a learned Lemprière." The atmosphere of his studiousness, however, was not prosaically academic. The gods and goddesses actually lived and moved and had a being in his imagination. Macbeth overwhelmed it with the terrifying power of hallucinations. "Macbeth," the lad said to a companion, "should not be read at night."

Some specific pictures come down to us from these schooldays. Three are especially significant.

The Schoolroom: An usher is boxing the ears of his brother Tom; poor frail Tom. Little John rushes up, squares off with his fists, his eyes flashing vengeance, and drives in to the rescue.

The Dining Hall: The clatter and hungry eagerness of seventy boys at the long tables. Keats has a book on his lap. He reaches out unconsciously toward the trencher, munches his ration of bread, while his eyes are intent on the pages of Bishop Burnet's "History of my Own Time."

The Dormitory: It is night. The faint light

from the sky reveals the row of beds and the sleeping schoolboys. One is still awake, listening with quiet rapture to the music of a pianoforte. The master's son is playing in a room below. That same music, years after, was heard again in an old castle on St. Agnes' Eve, "yearning like a god in pain."

At fifteen there was an end of schooling. The mother had died of consumption. The fortune of the four Keats children — eight thousand pounds — was in the control of a guardian. Mr. Abbey was a tea-merchant, philistine, prudential. He took John from Enfield and apprenticed him to a surgeon of Edmonton, two miles away.

IV

SURGERY

Bound to a country doctor for five years: to hold his horse; to fetch and carry drugs; to help bleed the patients; to pick up his profession from treatises and observation, — such was Keats' routine. But he had been inoculated with the charm of literature. In his leisure he came across fields to the school for books like a thirsty cotter to the alehouse. Cowden Clarke read poetry to him in the arbor of the school garden.

> The while the woods make answer and their echoes ring.

The "Epithalamion" stirred a bubble of enthusiasm. "The Faerie Queene" opened his eyes wide upon an elysian domain of magic and beauty. That intellectual ambition began to define itself in desire — creative desire. Spenser was simply the agent of Fate.

For some cause — he talks about "clenching his fist at Hammond" — Keats broke loose

from the apprenticeship. Yet he held to his drugs and anatomy and went down to the hospital schools in London. He had his way to make in the world. A notebook, still preserved, shows a careful transcription of the medical lectures. The troop of fairies, however, that came into the lecture-room in a sunbeam one morning betrays the unprofessional imagination.

Surgery should be an antidote for the poetic frenzy; especially the old-fashioned surgery. Doctors had no anæsthetics, no antiseptics, no arterial forceps. They strapped a man to a table, gave him a bullet to clench in his teeth and let him groan and flinch. Dissection is always deadening to the finer sensibilities. And dissection, in Keats' day, had gruesome preliminaries: the stealthy excursions of professor and students by night to exhume subjects from the Potter's Field. Jerry Cruncher or some other "resurrectionist" may have saved Keats this drastic experience. But he could not have saved him the contact with malformations, diseased organs and putrid flesh. The genius of a "Monk" Lewis might have thrived on such ugliness. To the future odist of the Grecian Urn it must surely have been a test for disenchantment.

A dilettante would have been put to rout. The

THE HAMMOND HOUSE AT EDMONTON

fact that Keats, with his fine sensibilities, went through this ordeal without shrinking is proof of stern fibre. And he went through to the end. In July, 1815, — the echoes of Waterloo were in the air, — he passed his examination at Apothecaries' Hall with honors and received an appointment as dresser at Guy's Hospital. He was thus a full-fledged practitioner.

There is an illuminating anecdote from Stephens, a roommate. It shows the undercurrent in Keats rising to the surface. Already he was in jocular repute among his fellow-students for dabbling in verse. One evening the two were sitting in their room, Stephens at his medical book, Keats idling, dreaming. From the candle-maker's shop below came intermittently the noise of a customer. Suddenly Keats spoke in the twilight: —

"'A thing of beauty is a constant joy.' What do you think of that, Stephens?"

"It has the true ring, but it is wanting in some way."

An interval of silence.

"'A thing of beauty is a joy forever.' What do you think of that?"

A moment of suspense and a prophetic judgment.

"That it will *live* forever."

Keats was approaching his majority. He had written some imitations of Spenser, an ode to Apollo and other experimental verse, all kept in hiding. The creative desire gradually passed into a persistent craving. Cowden Clarke came down to London on a visit. They spent that red-letter night together, with the borrowed folio of Chapman's Homer, reading rapturously into the small hours. The next morning Keats sent Clarke the sonnet — that passport of a poet into the realms of gold. Keats himself had been staring at an unsailed Pacific. At last an authentic muse had descended and commissioned him to put out to sea.

A scruple caused the final break with surgery. One day he opened a man's temporal artery. The operation was done with skill, but with an absent mind. For while his hand worked, his thoughts drifted involuntarily into fairyland. Oliver Wendell Holmes has given the advice to young physicians that they should never let any one suspect they have any serious interests outside of their professions. Keats had an even more scrupulous sense of responsibility to his patients. He laid down the lancet and never took it up again. Surgery was not to be his calling.

GUY'S HOSPITAL IN LONDON

V

HAMPSTEAD HEATH

CLARKE was Keats' teacher in the kindergarten phase. He fostered his poetic taste and instructed him in the rudiments of metre. This gracious mentor next took some of the experimental verses to a man of considerable literary influence. The manuscripts, arousing curiosity and interest, procured for the author a cordial invitation to Leigh Hunt's cottage in the Vale of Health. The scene shifts from Guy's Hospital to Hampstead Heath.

Hampstead Heath! There the conspirators assembled to watch Guy Fawkes blow up the House of Parliament. There Nell Gwyn in her mansion received her royal lover. And Coleridge, in his old age, "sat on the brow of Highgate Hill, looking down on London and its smoke-tumult." But Keats has given it more prestige than any of these. In his day it was a rural suburb with ancestral homes, outlying farms and tenements.

Stage-coaches ran from the city with relays of horses for the upslopes. The main road was mediæval with antique inns, antique shops, antique houses. The Heath itself was picturesque with footpaths, stiles, fences, ponds, meadows, woodlands and open wastes where the furze blossomed yellow in summer. From the summit of Primrose Hill one had a vista of the roofs and steeples and drifting vapors of London; and of the dome of St. Paul's, five miles away. In the Vale of Health, not far from the Spaniard's Tavern, Leigh Hunt lived with his "leafy luxuries," his "wine, music and sociality."

Hunt, editor of the liberal "Examiner," was in the lime-light of notoriety when Keats met him. He had printed the blunt truth about the Regent and the courts had declared the truth to be a libel. Those two years in Surrey gaol, more than anything else, perhaps, give distinction to his water-color portrait. He is seen there as a prince of Barmecides. Stone walls made no prison. He played the gentleman of leisure with his piano, books, pictures, flowers, sky-blue ceiling; with his promenades in the gaol-yard, formally dressed, kid-gloved, reckless of being late for dinner. The incarceration brought him some halo of martyrdom.

Hunt made, in his way, a real contribution to the fine art of living. Yet critical tradition patronizes and slurs him. The reason is doubtless his gospel of incorrigible cheerfulness, a gospel that ultimately wears on the nerves. It is well enough to bear woes like a man; but, as Macduff finely declared, one must also feel them like a man. Hunt, somehow, lacked the capacity to feel deeply. His nature is suggestive of Donatello, the faun creature.

The proof is his poetry. He posed as a creator of a style and offered as an illustrious example his "Story of Rimini." Dante's few lines, powerful beyond the reach of the imagination, are poignant with the tense vibrations of tragedy.

Amor condusse noi ad una morte.

Hunt took the theme which Dante left perfect for the ages and he perfumed it with rose-water. He lilted along airily through four cantos and etherized the passion. The effort was as injudicious as if he had done the story of the prodigal son in anacreontics. An enemy dubbed him "sweet Master Shallow." Nevertheless, despite a deficiency of real genius, Hunt had pluck and he was capable of noble friendships.

Keats passed under his influence, young, as-

piring, grateful of recognition. There was a blessing in the elder's encouragement, but bane in the direction of the artistic pressure. At that time Keats cared more for decoration than for profound feeling. The two had, therefore, a natural affinity, a love of pretty things, and they flattered each other's weakness. Hunt opened his home and heart, made a couch for the visitor in his library, stimulated his ambition, recommended his own style of heroic couplet and introduced him to a literary coterie. Keats met, first and last, Reynolds, Haydon, Shelley, Dilke, Brown and Severn.

The occasional verses of these months give glimpses of his life. In Hunt's library — a miniature museum of busts and pictures — the little clan gathered, wrote competitive sonnets, spent the evenings in animated chat and, like the snow-bound Esquimaux in winter, indulged themselves too generously in mutual admiration. Keats left reluctantly for the long dark walk to his lodgings in London. But he went oblivious of cold, winds and stars. His mind was full of Milton and Italian poetry. His heart was overflowing with creative impulses. His spirit was on the heights. And he renders these moods of exaltation — the noteworthy feature — in terms

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of singing angels, pink robes, wavy hair, silver harps, pearly chariots—all pretty things.

Haydon was something of a counter-influence. If Hunt with his elegant trifles is comparable to a Cellini, Haydon, with his hammering energy, is comparable to the god Thor. A tempestuous soul; of heroic aspirations; egotistic, tireless, almost a conqueror of fame. Keats spent hours in his studio, deeply impressed by the painter's highmindedness. "Consider principle of more value than genius," he advised the young poet. "Collect incident, study character, read Shakespeare and trust in Providence." The divine fire in Haydon, however, was fitful. He professed to find a refuge in God and he found his final refuge in suicide.

These two personal influences played upon the plastic nature of Keats while he was making the first collection of poems. The Hunt pressure was by far the stronger. The volume of 1817, in substance and technique, shows the predilections of the creator of the new style. It was dedicated to Hunt and when issued it was reviewed and praised in the "Examiner." The début was ill-starred. For Keats was thus publicly affiliated with the libeler of the Regent and his poetry was associated with the political radicalism which had made its nest on Hampstead Heath.

VI

CHARACTERISTICS

It is desirable now to examine the poetic personality of Keats. He has attained self-consciousness, chosen his calling and begun his work. What in his equipment is peculiar? From what do the creative impulses proceed?

The Bible is the chief source of our exalted sentiments. A boy, born of English parents, bred in an English community, must come into contact, more or less, with the history, the poetry, the ethics of the Christian traditions. The character of Keats, of course, was affected involuntarily by his environment. But his conscious attitude toward the Christian faith and the church was indifference. Emerson rejected the sacrament of the Lord's Supper because he did n't find it "interesting." Keats turned from the faith and the church because he did n't find them interesting. He admired the splendor, the disinterested service of Jesus; he held blindly, waveringly, to a belief in immortality. Never-

theless all the grandeur of the patriarchs, prophets, psalmists; all the spiritual fervor that inspired the tragedy on Calvary were lost on him. He draws a very few images from Hebrew history; Ruth amid the corn is the most notable instance. Apart from these his poetry derives no tincture of power from the Bible or the Christian faith.

A poet need not be evangelical or even biblical. We expect, though, that a modern poet shall have some conception of the world-scheme as ordered by modern science; that he shall be consistent with the facts of common knowledge. The sunlight, for Keats, penetrates brilliantly into submarine deeps. He would cool his claret in a cellar a mile deep, where the temperature would be very hot. He causes strawberries and apples to ripen at the same time and grows them beside almond trees and cinnamon. Such things will pass, under poetic license, as possible in the empire of the gods. But the fact that the gods must be invoked so often in the apology shows that Keats, in the main, is oblivious of natural law. He may find his raw materials on this earth; he rears his creations in Poets' No-Man's-Land.

There is, moreover, an alien fusion of substance and form. He looks out upon the world

with the ideas and instincts of some young ancient Greek who, by a wishing-cap, has been translated through time and space to the Wartburg — let us say — and there educated with Tannhäuser. He holds to the Greek cosmogony: a flat earth, a labyrinthine underworld, a sea floor of palaces. He preserves his Greek individuality: the delight in nature, the reverence for the gods, the easy self-content amid the mystery of man's fate. The Wartburg, with its dire theology of heaven and hell-fire, has not quelled his frank animal joyousness. He has not been contaminated by the morbid soul-searchings of Tannhäuser. He remains a child of the ancient faith. Yet his feeling for that faith, withal, has been transformed by the strange exotic culture. In the fatherland his imagination was like a marble temple, flushed with cool white light. In the mediæval castle it has become like a hall crowded with elaborate furnishings and illumined by the iridescence of stained glass. And the language in which he expresses his feelings seems intricate, indirect, lavish in its fullness of detail. The change has an analogy in his garments. Instead of the simple loose-flowing robe, he wears the tight jerkin and the velvet knightly cloak, rich in colors, embroidery and gems.

The resources of Keats are drawn confusedly from ancient and mediæval life. If we search, however, for his original stimulus to poetry, we shall find it to be neither ancient nor mediæval, but eternal. Novalis had his Blue Flower; Wordsworth his lakes and hills; Dante his Beatrice. The genius of Keats was first awakened by the moon.

The child is father of the man and the enthusiasms of the boy are usually the inspiration of a poet's early efforts. Spenser may have turned the attention of Keats to poetry as a calling. But it was the moon which first brought him the light that never was on sea or land. The prominence of the theme in his thought, in his early work, is significant. Its recurrence in his letters, in later years, is corroborative. Certain passages of "Endymion," which may fairly be taken as confessional, are convincing. The moon moved his childish heart potently. It was the consoling mother for his tears. It was the mystic presence that shared his joys, the comrade of his solitude, the substitute for mountains, books, friends, feminine charms. It filled the earth with delight and opened his eyes to the beauty of the inner vision. This child, reared over a stable, educated at a commonplace school, in his moods of loneli-

ness and melancholy chose a pagan object of worship. It was not the Bible, nor the perplexities of science, nor political liberalism, nor nature, nor even love that gave the stimulus to his creative life. It was the cult of the moon.

Here is the origin of Keats. At first, like primitive man, he viewed the moon as a mere physical wonder, inspiring awe. This is the beginning of natural religion. At school he found the mythology of Greece. By the myth-making faculty the moon was identified with a personality. This is the next, the anthropomorphic stage of religious culture. Upon his reverence for the physical wonder he imposed the worship of Diana. To her he gave the loyalty of a devotee, and the moon, now only her throne, became an underpassion thereafter. The story of Endymion claimed his interest as a picturesque accretion of fable.

All this seems so artificial; the mythology of Greece seems so dead, so irretrievably dead. But Keats will be a closed book to him who is an antiquarian and nothing more. It may be artificial in fact; in the psychology of genius it is very vital. Wordsworth demands as much suspension of disbelief. That huge black peak in the "Prelude" which stirred in his imagination

a sense of "unknown modes of being" is just as false in science. Yet that experience is the basis of Wordsworth's vision as a seer. The presence "whose dwelling is the light of setting suns"—Diana in the moon; a difference in terminology; the one abstract, the other specific; both referable, in truth, to the invisible power. The two poets, each in his own way, delivered their messages. Wordsworth, as an anodyne for the world-woe of his generation, developed a moral philosophy in which joy was regained by faith in the eternal benevolence. Keats, as a refuge from the ills of life, was reaching out for an æsthetic philosophy in which joy was attained by faith in eternal beauty. Both, in essence, were poets of a natural religion. And while the elder, having lost "the glory and the freshness of the dream," found his consolation in "the philosophic mind," the younger fought off the philosophic mind and preserved the glory and the freshness of the dream. There is in Keats' character a strain of perpetual youth. It came in large measure from his adoration of a mythology which was vital in the youth of the world. For the piety of the Greeks, so irretrievably dead, had a peculiar virtue,—the virtue of glee.

VII

THE VOLUME OF 1817

KEATS begat Tennyson," says Mr. Saintsbury, "and Tennyson begat all the rest." The late poet-laureate would have objected to the first assertion. Arnold, Browning, Rossetti and Swinburne might well protest against the second. Let us modify the statement. Let us say that Keats created a distinguished original style and that he has had a strong influence on Victorian poetry.

Originality is the repetition of a type with a difference. It lies sometimes in insight, sometimes in fresh emphasis. Falstaff is the fat comical braggart with the addition of an agile brain. Lincoln contributed original power to the idea of popular rule when he spoke of "a government of the *people*, by the *people*, for the *people*." The query about originality in the juvenile poems of Keats, then, concerns new vision and new energy of expression.

In the volume of 1817 there are two poems of description, three epistles, seventeen sonnets, a scattering of short negligible pieces and a long poem of personal revelation. As a basis for composition — the last poem is reserved for separate discussion — he had his typical things: landscapes of nature, literary friendships and the models of other poets. To these typical things what does he add that is significantly different?

The consensus of critical opinion answers, "Very little!" The volume is interesting mainly as material for biography. There are some signs of promise: independence, enthusiasm, copious richness of detail. The defects are striking: incoherent ideas, perverse diction, forced awkward style. Except for one sonnet, there is no final excellence. Isolated lines, however, give hints of noble game still at large in the preserves of his imagination. They give us the scent for the trail.

His mind is alert for fine subtle perceptions. Most of us are Peter Bells; the primrose is only a yellow primrose. Keats shows the true poetic instinct in the search for emotional values in the commonplace. Sometimes it is strained, inapt. He measures time, for instance, by the reading of two sonnets and the flight of a bee around a peach tree. But there is also some rare discern-

ment of undiscovered delight: the early sobbing of the morn; the sigh that silence heaves; the voice of crystal bubbles; the taper fingers of sweet peas; the wine of lustre like a falling star; the lily and the musk rose as emblems of youthful lovers; the pose of the lady as keenest in beauty when she stands with parted lips, listening.

He records his dislike for murky London, beloved of Pope, Addison, Johnson, who still governed the public taste. He is in revolt. He belongs to the new age. He is infected with the "Return to Nature." He finds enchantment in the woods, with some old ruin near by and an intellectual comrade for company. But he is not world-weary. He is not touched by the spiritual malady of the *Weltschmerz*. He does not seek nature, like Byron, to weep out his woes on the breast of the great mother. Keats simply loves to lie on the grass, write verses and dream of fable-land. Chaucer, watching his favorite daisy, was not more joyously at ease.

It must be observed, too, that this youth has peered into the depths of Wordsworth. He has much of "Tintern Abbey" by heart. And though Jeffrey has pronounced upon the "Excursion," "This will never do," Keats believes it is one of the achievements of the times. Moreover,

those whom he has chosen from the great dead for reverence, — Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, — they suggest the high tone of his aspirations.

Nevertheless his actual performance is not virile. His emotions seek no outlet in action. In fancy he cherishes those images of sensuous dalliance derived from the Spenserian tradition: the convoy of a barefoot girl across a brook; the caress of maidens with breasts of cream; the indulgence in lovers' trances of delight. The imagery, if sensuous, is chaste. The chaste Diana is his goddess; the extreme of voluptuous ecstasy is symbolized in "the sweets of the rose." Note this fact. The moon gives him the keenest emotion; the moon, "maker of poets . . . the enthusiast's friend . . . above all other glories." Here at the outset we see why Keats' poetry is so attractive to women of fine grain. It appeals to the senses, yet it is devoid of all brutality. It may have abandon, but never the wild animal abandon of the decadents. There is a tempering coolness in his blood. At the thought of passionate Italian beauties he desires merely "to float with them about the summer waters."

The scent of the trail is his relish for tidbits of fleeting pleasure. Even this requires a word of interpretation. In the hunt for pleasure there

is an involuntary gravitation of his mind from the physical things of the senses to the imaginary. "He never beheld an oak tree without seeing the dryad," Hunt testifies. In the first poem, "I Stood Tip-toe upon a Little Hill," he revels in the scenery of Hampstead Heath, gathering pleasure from some seventeen flowers. The gravitation then draws him away to fable-land, where, through some fifteen classical memories, he rises to his rapture. It is in a mental world, not a physical, that Keats finds his natural home.

The point is important. Matthew Arnold states that Keats was known to the public as the poet of

> Light feet, dark violet eyes and parted hair;
> Soft dimpled hands, white neck and creamy breast.

How blindly the public must have read the printed page! These very lines were written to express by contrast a superior preference. He forgets such things, he declares, before he dines. Women have no power over him unless they can stir him to an exalted mood. The truth is that Keats' instinct for feminine beauty, though not possessing all the grave dignity, is otherwise similar to Milton's. It is a voluptuous pleasure of the senses; yet that sensuousness is an underpassion of the soul.

VIII

SLEEP AND POETRY

In the minor poems of 1817 we find hints of genius. "Sleep and Poetry," the last of the collection, shows genius in the larval state. It is easy to rail at its floridity and obscurity. A little sympathy, or even open-mindedness, will detect an atmosphere of awe. This is "the Chamber of Maiden Thought." A fire burns here, the fire of a vestal fane. It is the heart's confessional and the critic should listen to these ardent outpourings of a soul with priest-like deference.

The title recalls the library of Hunt, the naps on the couch, the poetic aspirations amid the busts and pictures. Sleep and poetry, indeed, are only points of departure for Keats to talk about himself, his art and his hopes for the future.

The poem opens with a display of figurative language, lustrous, incongruous. Sleep is a riddle propounded in eight queries. It then experiences several incarnations: as a watchful fairy, a nurse

with lullabies, an imp with mischief for a beauty's hair. Poetry calls forth nine epithets and suggests two methods of inspiration, by thunder and by whisper. Life is described in a chain of eight metaphors, two of them worthy of remembrance: the light uplifting of a maiden's veil; the slumber of an Indian while his boat dashes down the falls. Such a profusion of imagery is gaudy ostentation. Keats has indulged in a riotous abuse of the analogical faculty.

In this poem occurs the well-known attack on Pope and the school of Boileau, an attack that stirred the hostility of Byron. Here again Keats is in revolt against the rational mechanical epigram style of the eighteenth century. The diatribe is doubtless an echo of the warfare by Hunt, although Keats had a natural antipathy for Pope and all his followers. He regards them as chippers and filers; callous to beauty; blasphemers of "the bright Lyrist." One sentence ridicules the technique of the heroic coupleteers most effectively: —

> They swayed about upon a rocking-horse
> And thought it Pegasus.

There is another passage, hitherto regarded as obscure, in which Keats makes a stricture upon those contemporary poets whose work he other-

wise greets with delight. This stricture helps to define his own individuality. The dark lines speak of certain subjects as monster Polyphemes and of sheer strength as comparable to a fallen angel. Hunt gives a clue of interpretation. He says the lines refer to "the morbidity that taints the productions of the Lake poets." The censure would then fall upon Southey for his evil magicians in the Domdaniel caverns; upon Coleridge for the witchcraft of Lady Geraldine. And Wordsworth, too, may be slightly under the ban; for the stout-hearted Jeffrey once declared that certain of his poems filled him with "a giddy terror." Keats is thus seen in opposition to that current of wild romanticism which came from Germany, flowed muddily through "Monk" Lewis and Anne Radcliffe and clarified into poetry with the "Lakers." The tales of terror had no fascination for him. He was blind to that penny-dreadful muse from Germany which favored bugaboos and sought to inspire haunting fears.

"Sleep and Poetry" reveals his high conception of his calling. He abjures the dogmatic authority of reason, maintained by Pope. He would restore to poetry the supremacy of imagination. But he would not permit the imagina-

tion to be a purveyor of emotions of dread; to conjure up Domdaniel demons or even beautiful malignant witches. Poetry is "awful sweet and holy." It is a safeguard against worldliness and folly. It has a virtue to cleanse the soul for "the great Maker's presence." Its mission is to be the friend of man, to soothe his cares, to lift his thoughts. The lyrical cry of his art is "Rejoice! Rejoice!"

> And they shall be accounted poet-kings
> Who simply tell the most heart-easing things.

And the cry of his present desire is for ten years of preparatory education.

First of all he would have experience in the refinement of the senses. How naïvely he gives the details! He would sleep on the grass, feed upon fruits, catch nymphs in the forest, steal kisses, bite their white shoulders, watch their dances, follow one into a tropical bower to rest — note the simile — like two gems in a pearly shell. This is not sensuality. It all happens in Pan's realm. If there be any indiscretion in the printing of such dalliance, as suggestive of the Babes in the Woods, let it be excused on the ground that the inexperienced poet, aiming at the simplicity of ancient pastoral innocence, fell

short into simpleness. Even the austere must be touched by the simple deliciousness.

The refinement of the senses is only preliminary. The higher education of his desire is the knowledge of actual life; the experience of virile emotions; if need be, the agonies of struggle. Keats here seems to yearn with a man's yearning for the Odyssean trials that give play to the heroic energies. Hitherto his life has been easy, remote from storm and stress. In his inexperience he pictures the great hurly-burly of the world in an apocalyptic day-dream. The charioteer of life, riding upon a cloud, leads the visionary people. They pass, in streaming procession, laden with joy or sorrow or sin, lured on by ever-fleeting music. A few of the lines are almost Dantesque in the economy of diction and the range of second sight. They recall that sad procession in the "Inferno," the sandy plain, the pelting balls of fire.

> Lo! how they murmur, laugh and smile and weep:
> Some with upholden hands and mouth severe;
> Some with their faces muffled to the ear
> Between their arms. Some clear in youthful bloom
> Go glad and smilingly athwart the gloom;
> Some looking back and some with upward gaze.

The mood of the author of "Sleep and Poetry" is that of a neophyte in a temple of divine mys-

tery. The blind impulses of boyhood have passed into light. The call has come. He shrinks, hides his "foolish face," knowing his lack of wisdom. But with the courage of the valiant and the distrust of the modest he dedicates himself with head bowed before the vast idea of his art. Such humility and awe call up inevitably the memory of the chosen one on Horeb who veiled his eyes before the burning bush.

And yet they told him, those first reviewers, to go back to his apothecary shop and stick to plasters, pills and ointment boxes.

IX

NEW EXPERIENCE

THE next performance of Keats was daring, even foolhardy. An epic about the moon! Epic poets usually have copious preëxisting materials: ballads, legends, racial traditions; an imposing hero. Keats had one personification, Diana, and one mythical incident, her love for the Latmian shepherd; nothing more. But the project involved the enthusiasm of his youth and offered a test to his powers. "It will be a trial of my imagination," he wrote, "and chiefly of my invention, by which I must make four thousand lines of one bare circumstance and fill them with poetry." Hunt tried to dissuade him from a long poem; impetuous Haydon urged him on and advised isolation. Keats followed the latter's advice. Although always grateful to Hunt, and cordial, he became independent of his influence. "Endymion" is all his own.

It is fascinating to watch him during the next

few months. New forces play upon his nature. Waves of creative energy surge over him, lift him up, dash him down, exhausted. He experiences the artist's ecstasy; the fever, the fret, the despair. The letters tell the story very vividly.

He left companionable Hampstead and went to the Isle of Wight for solitude and concentration. You can see him on the stage-coach, riding outside, wrapped in a plaid shawl, his hungry eyes peering on the scenery. At Southampton the sight of the sea inspires a new passion: —

> O ye! who have your eye-balls vex'd and tir'd,
> Feast them upon the wideness of the sea.

He crosses to the island, settles near Carisbrooke ruins, in a primrose spot with a vista of salt water and white cliffs. There his moods are intense, tumultuous. "I find I cannot exist without Poetry — without eternal Poetry," he writes back. "Half the day will not do — the whole of it. . . . I had become all in a tremble from not having written anything of late — the sonnet overleaf did me good. I slept the better last night for it." In the heat of work he loses his poise; his nerves are overwrought; he suffers from insomnia. He flees to Margate on the mainland.

Brother Tom with his fatal cough joins him

there. At Margate he suffers an unsatisfied craving for trees. He reads and writes eight hours a day. Shakespeare's picture is above his writing-table. Keats is possessed of a half-playful obsession which fosters a belief that the great Elizabethan has become his presiding Genius. In the letters he is now "everlasting friend" to Haydon. He admits that Hunt is the victim of "self-delusions" and dreads such for himself. Money-matters distress him; he calls them nettles in his bed. Black ravens of distrust fly about him; distrust of his poetic powers. He discovers a new source of weakness, "a horrid Morbidity of Temperament." He broods, beset with doubts and fears. Still he writes steadily, feverishly, eight hours a day. Again his head begins to swim. He heeds the warning and again flees — to Canterbury and the soothing associations of Chaucer.

His perturbed spirit, like Hamlet, is thinking too precisely on the event. But a Horatio offers relief for the overwrought nerves. This is Bailey, a scholar, reading for the Church, who invites him to Oxford. Bailey is the right man at the right moment; the perfect intellectual comrade. With him Keats finds his equilibrium. Those are halcyon weeks at Oxford. Rambles in the country by day, boating on the Isis, readings of

Wordsworth in a favorite cove; at night in the college rooms, discussions on literature, life and "the mystery of things." The work, too, is regular; fifty lines a day on the third book of "Endymion." Here Keats seals a friendship. The sterling character of Bailey, he affirms, is greater than genius; he wishes for him the blessing of "a Peona wife." And the host bears testimony to the graciousness of Keats, the fascination of his talk, the throbbing earnestness of his ambition.

After Oxford come more wandering and feverish writing; in lodgings at Well Walk and in London. The first attack on Hunt and the Cockney School appears in "Blackwood's." The name of Keats is printed in heavy black type, a portent of the future. "I don't relish his abuse," Keats writes of the anonymous enemy, and in the event of the anticipated outrage he meditates a challenge. The "terrier courage" is aroused. It is some time during this period that he fights the butcher in the blind alley; stands up to his man for an hour and finally conquers.

Trouble is brewing elsewhere. The coterie of Hampstead Heath is breaking up. "Everybody is at loggerheads." Mrs. Hunt borrowed some of Haydon's silver and did n't return it on time;

Hunt and Haydon are backbiting each other in consequence. Haydon and Reynolds are at odds. Horace Smith is offended at Hunt. Amid the jangling, diminutive Keats looms large and magnanimous. "Men should bear with each other," he says to Bailey. "There lives not the man who may not be cut up, aye, lashed to pieces on his weakest side. . . . The sure way is first to know a man's faults and then be passive — if after that he insensibly draws you towards him, then you have no power to break the link." It is very significant that Keats, when he once made friends, held them to the end.

"Endymion" was finished at Burford Bridge. He went up Box Hill alone at night to view the moon and came back to write his last lines. It was here, too, that he first began to formulate his poetic philosophy of the imagination as the ultimate source of truth.

The strain is over. The revision and fair copy for the printer can be made in the cool of the blood. Keats gives himself over to diversion — is much in London. He goes the rounds with the gay. One night he is "dyin' scarlet" with some boon comrades. Another night he takes a peep into the green-room of a theatre. A third he attends Haydon's dinner, meeting Wordsworth,

Lamb, Landseer; the "immortal dinner" at which Lamb played tipsy and held the candle in the face of the bumptious commissioner of stamps. During the Christmas holidays he entertains his little sister Fanny in town. One sees him, in fancy, holding her hand as they crowd with the other children into the pantomime. This affection for the orphan sister is one of his exquisite unwritten poems. In this period he writes a sonnet on the Nile in competition with Hunt and Shelley. He also attends Hazlitt's lectures on the English poets and records that there are three great things in the present age: Wordsworth's "Excursion," Haydon's pictures, and Hazlitt's depth of taste. There is more revelry. On one occasion he goes to a dance party, where the host has "eight dozen" in reserve for the unquenchables. The night passes in racketing, drinking and cutting for half-guineas — "uproar the only music." Yet the carouse must have been canonical; for Bailey was there and enjoyed himself. Two things in these days bring pleasure and pain: a rumor from the West country of his poetic fame; the discovery of the mortal Wordsworth, his stiff choker collars and his "egotistical sublime."

Three books of "Endymion" are in the hands

ROOM IN WHICH KEATS FINISHED ENDYMION

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of the publisher. With the fourth still to revise he goes for a tour in Devon, "the splashy, rainy, misty, snowy, foggy, haily, floody, muddy, slip-shod country." Here he wrote the fine fragment of the "Ode to Maia." Here he lay awake in the dark, listening to the rain with the sensation of rotting like a grain of wheat. On this trip, too, he saw the Devonshire girl at the inn-door, the picture of whom, in imagination, kept him warm during a chilly ride.

> Where be ye going, you Devon maid?
> And what have ye there in the Basket?
> Ye tight little fairy just fresh from the dairy,
> Will ye give me some cream if I ask it?—

This is the phase of his "yeasting youth." It has its revels and raptures. But the heart-aches and agonies are not far distant. Finance is grim-staring. His brother George is about to emigrate to America and break the family tie. Poor Tom also will soon emigrate to his final home. Already Keats is brooding on that theme which so fascinated him later,—the thought of his own death.

> When I have fears that I may cease to be
> Before my pen has gleaned the teeming brain—

That bodeful sonnet belongs to these days. The "Chamber of Maiden Thought" is darkening. Its windows are revealing "the mist—the burden

of the mystery." Misery lurks upon the horizon. But the joy of life is still dominant, the burning of desire and the brightness of dream. It is against the background of these earthly lights and shadows that we must define the iridescent fantasies of "Endymion."

X

ENDYMION

THERE is a tradition, started by Gifford, that "Endymion" is unreadable. The world at large quotes the first line as a proverb. Literary critics garnish their essays with a few of its scintillating phrases. Polite society knows that the poem deals with the classical myth of Diana and the sleeping shepherd. Some lovers of poetry may have a mild enthusiasm for the hymn to Pan and the learned may tell them that Wordsworth pronounced this "a pretty piece of paganism." "Endymion," as a whole, has lain neglected like a vein of low-grade ore. Even the biographers have failed to mine this gold-bearing quartz.

It is our present purpose to analyze the poem and then to look at it with the eyes of Keats.

The action begins with a procession in honor of Pan. Endymion, prince of the shepherds, enters last. He is moody, absent in mind from the ceremony. For he has beheld a celestial

vision in the moon which has inspired him with the ardor of a mystical love. His sister Peona later prevails upon him to struggle against this luxurious brooding and to cherish his worldly fame as a chieftain. But mysterious agencies are more influential than his resolution. The vision haunts his memory. A butterfly lures him into the forest. A naiad in a pool imposes a pilgrimage. A voice bids him descend into the hollows of the underworld.

He enters by a cavern and pursues his way through subterranean splendors to a shrine of Diana. To her he makes a prayer and passes on. In the arbor of Adonis he meets Venus, who encourages his pilgrimage and prophesies success. An eagle carries him to a jasmine bower and there the nameless love appears to him, declares herself to be one of the celestials and confesses a secret though heaven-forbidden passion. Before leaving she promises his ultimate happiness. Then he sleeps. On awaking he witnesses in a grotto the pursuit of Arethusa by the amorous Alpheus, both dissolved into darting streams of water. Suddenly his senses are overwhelmed; he finds himself on the sandy floor of the ocean.

In the sea depths he indulges in a fervent worship of the moon, protesting that this reverence

was the passion of his life until the strange love came. Afterward he encounters Glaucus, an old man, enchanted by Circe for a thousand years. Endymion breaks the spell, restores his youth and follows him to a submarine mausoleum of dead lovers. There he revives a multitude, Scylla, beloved of Glaucus, among them; and all proceed, rejoicing, over the sea floor to the temple of Neptune.

In due time Endymion is miraculously transported back to the sylvan earth. An Indian bacchante crosses his path. Endymion, astray, now hopeless of attaining the celestial one, offers to her an earthly union. After some confusing adventures on aerial steeds, the bacchante declares that she is forbidden to his love. The two return to his native hill. There, in the presence of Peona, Endymion vows himself to a hermit life of solitude. It is after this vow — the fact should be emphasized — that the Indian bacchante is suddenly revealed as the celestial Diana and the object of his quest. Before the goddess bears Endymion to the abode of the immortals, she explains the motive of the mysterious pilgrimage: —

> And then 't was fit that from this mortal state
> Thou shouldst, my love, by some unlook'd for change,
> Be *spiritualiz'd*.

The narrative is bizarre; apparently meaningless; long, diffuse, devoid of any dramatic concentration. No wonder, then, that it fails to arouse a human interest or even to strike the attention. The virtues of the poem must be sought.

"If you should read Richardson for the story," said Dr. Johnson, "your impatience would be so fretted that you would hang yourself. You must read him for the sentiment." Perhaps the sentiment in "Endymion" might have driven the Doctor to the rope as quickly as the story. For that kind of sentiment of which the philistine is particularly intolerant gives to the poem its unique value.

In appreciations so much depends on the mood of approach. For "Endymion" the architectural taste, so keenly satisfied by the Parthenon, by the "Divine Comedy," must be wholly suppressed. One must approach it as one goes into the picture galleries of Europe: to glance casually at the innumerable specimens of innumerable painters; to forget most of them, but to hold in memory the imposing masterpieces. The acres of canvas are many; the rememberable pictures are few. So it is with this poem. If it is read by the selective method, it may become a source of profit and pleasure. Indeed the best way to emphasize

its vitality is to pick out some of the best of the fantasies and to comment upon them in the manner of art criticism.

THE FESTIVAL OF PAN

A marble altar stands in a grove surrounded by children, maidens, shepherds in ceremonial robes. The priest pours the libation from an alabaster urn. Endymion, apart, in a chariot, seems disconsolate. It is early dawn. The atmosphere has a magical light and charm as in the paintings of Corot. The choral song to Pan is rich in local color and folk-lore. The piety of the Greeks is perceived to be a blending of reverence and glee.

ENDYMION'S VISION

The moon is behind a thin cloud. Diana, with scarf fluttering in the wind, is partially obscured in the effulgence. Her face has an expression of maiden timidity; her outreaching hand suggests regal graciousness. Endymion gazes at the vision, rapt, dazzled; his limbs are alive with the coursing blood. The color scheme is prevailingly blue and gold, as in Murillo's Assumption of the Virgin. The atmosphere is electrically charged yet cool.

THE NAIAD IN THE POOL

Endymion is prone on the turf. The naiad has emerged from the lilies; her dripping fingers at the lips send him a greeting of affection. The virgin light penetrates the water, revealing pebbles, bright sand, many-colored fish. The sweet regret in the nymph's eyes is poetically suggestive of the ancient sympathy of the spirits of nature for man.

THE LABYRINTH OF THE UNDERWORLD

A long arcade of gloom with faint flashing illuminations. Vaguely visible are winding passages, cliffs, walls of glistening metal. The deep gulf, arched by a natural bridge, is the channel of a turbulent stream. The dominant light comes from a huge diamond amid the milder gleams of sapphire, gold and silver. At the end of the vista, set among pillars, is a marble image of Diana. There is utter silence except for the noise of the waters. Endymion moves along with fearsome awe. These mysteries are viewed most favorably with the aid of Aladdin's lamp.

THE ARBOR OF ADONIS

Adonis lies asleep on a couch of rosy silk; lilies at his head; vines form a green canopy.

The winter is past; it is the time for the coming of Venus. Cupids are breaking his slumber. One plays upon a lyre, another waves a scented bough, a third is pelting his closed eyes with violets. The picture might be interpreted as a mythical representation of Love's awakening in spring through the appeal to the senses.

THE INVOCATION TO THE MOON

Endymion is on the sea floor amid sunken wrecks and lost treasure. The moon is visible through the waters. He stands looking up, imploring. In his prayer he exalts the moon as a benevolent force in nature and as the inspiration of man's higher life in beauty. He pleads the devotion of his boyhood and confesses, with some qualms, his later apostasy from the moon to the moon's goddess. This worship is instinct with a fine rapture. It is a striking parallel to Wordsworth's confession of faith in "Tintern Abbey"; it shows the change from the passion for inanimate nature to that for the spiritual presence.

THE PALACE OF NEPTUNE

The sunrise illumines the sea depths. An army of lovers, just revived, is marching through a broad arch into the inner court of Neptune's

domain. They are coming to do reverence to the god of the sea. Domes on jasper columns shimmer with opalescent light. Within the golden doors of his palace the god sits on an emerald throne; Venus Anadyomene is beside him; about are dancing nereids. A canopy of gold-green radiance hovers above. Oceanus, dethroned, pauses on the confines to take a last look at the lost empire —

> Before he went into his quiet cave
> To muse forever.

These by no means exhaust the splendid fantasies which "Endymion" contains in a kind of turbid solution. It would be futile to maintain that Keats often fuses his details into artistic pictures. But the imagery went surging, powerful, through his heated brain. The lines of the poem are maundering imperfect records. The conceptions have not even the order of Utopian dreams, for in Utopia there are, at least, the laws of human relations. Keats' gorgeous phantasmagorias are rather like the wild outpourings of a bard. They lack the discretion of the modern artist, working with conscious design. They are, in fact, the product of that "fine frenzy" with which Shakespeare describes the lunatic, the lover and the poet; an example of airy nothings

turned into shapes and given a local habitation and a name. The names may be borrowed from ancient mythology. But the local habitation is neither in Greece nor on Mount Olympus. It is rather a realm built upon "the baseless fabric of a vision," where dwell the Ancient Mariner and Alastor and Prospero and the genii of Scheherezade's tales—the realm of Poets' No-Man's-Land.

Keats failed in competition with the great masters. He touched sublimity, but he could not dominate it.

XI

THE PHILOSOPHY OF SOUL-MAKING

THE purport of "Endymion" has never been made clear. Mrs. Owen has interpreted the poem as an allegory. Colvin assumes it to be "a parable of the soul's experience in pursuit of the ideal." Rossetti finds it meaningless and considerately reconstructs the fable. Keats did attach some philosophical ideas to his narrative; but his purpose was neither allegorical nor meaningless.[1]

"Endymion" seems a puzzle because the Anglo-Saxon critics have insisted upon reading it

[1] An allegory, as a literary type, is a sustained metaphor, drawn out to the length of a narrative, which particularizes the abstract. If "Endymion" is an allegory, then Keats was more interested in an abstraction than in a story. There is no external evidence that he was interested in an abstraction at all. There is definite proof that his purpose was to tell a story. It is possible that his imagination may have played, in passing, with symbols as allegorical figures of speech. But allegory may be forced out of anything. It is too often abused as a last refuge from obscurity.

through their ethical spectacles. They hunt for a moral issue where there is none.

The key to the puzzle is the meaning of the word "spiritualize" which Diana utters at the close. This commonly implies an elevation from the animal instincts to moral ideals. But Keats used it without any moral significance whatever. The episode with the Indian bacchante, supposed to be crucial, involves no remorse. "Spiritualize" has an æsthetic meaning only, and the senses are made the media of spiritualization. This word is the epitome of Keats' self-spun philosophy of Beauty. It is the *open sesame* to an understanding of his poetry.

"Oh, for a life of sensations rather than thoughts!" Every student of Keats knows of this exclamation, and pretty nearly every one associates it with Haydon's tale that the poet peppered his tongue in order to increase the delicious coolness of claret. The two things, as text and gloss, have given credibility to the fiction that Keats, with all his fine poetry, had an ignoble weakness for titillating his nerve-ends.

Keats peppered his tongue once; anybody might legitimately try that or a similar experiment. The exclamation, however, has been torn,

literally torn, from its context and made into debased currency; although its real meaning was all gold. Keats was at Burford Bridge when he wrote the passage about "spiritualize." While there he also wrote a letter to Bailey, containing this much-quoted phrase, which discussed the two methods of attaining truth, the intuitive and the rational. In the midst of his argument he suddenly broke out, "Oh, for a life of sensations rather than thoughts!" And the exclamation, interpreted by its context, simply meant, "I should rather live in the emotions of the heart, stirred by the imagination's conception of beauty, than in the intellectual truth gained from the processes of logic." It is the impetuous cry of the poet for the intuitive perceptions of the higher nature. Other phrases, used synonymously for the life of sensations, are "a Vision in the form of Youth" and "ethereal Musings upon Earth."

The garbled quotation thus turns out to be his first conscious endeavor to define the poetic in distinction from the philosophic mind.

> Do not all charms fly
> At the mere touch of cold philosophy?

he asked two years afterward in "Lamia." Keats disliked rigorous analysis. The imagination to him was the supremely desirable faculty.

Imagination brought the vision of truth to the heart invested with sublime emotion, while logic brought it to the head, cold and barren. In this same letter to Bailey is the first formal statement of his æsthetic principle, in which Beauty is identified with Truth. "*I am certain of nothing*," he wrote, "*but the holiness of the heart's affections and the truth of the Imagination. What the imagination seizes as Beauty must be Truth.*" He cited for illustration Adam's dream of Eve and his awakening to the reality in "Paradise Lost."

The exclamation and the æsthetic principle will help us to fix the precise meaning of "spiritualize." For in "Endymion" this line of thought is elaborated into a definite scheme of life.

> A thing of beauty is a joy forever;
> Its loveliness increases.

The argument then runs that if a beautiful perception is once made our own, it becomes a permanent possession; an inalienable power in the spirit to counteract the ills of human life. Instances of such things are the sun, the moon, the forest, clear streams of water, memories of the great dead. These, once seized and held, enter into our natures as haunting shapes of beauty: finer essences, which shed a cheering light amid the gloom of mortal depressions. They do not

pass with the hour. They abide with us, else we die — die the death of the higher life.

Endymion himself, when making his confession to Peona on the bowery island, extends the argument. Happiness, he urges, is found in the divine fellowship of the soul with the supreme essence. It is obtained by some alchemic change and it results in releasing the soul from its earthly limitations. Of the ministrants to happiness, lowest of all are physical pleasures, like the perfume of a rose. Higher in the scale are delights like music, which wakens old memories, prophesyings and martial energies. Such influences lift us from the carnal level; "our state is like a floating spirit's." Yet there are more elevating ministrants than these. Highest of all are friendship and love; the one a substantial splendor, the other a winged power which lifts the soul into a radiance above earthly ambition. Love is "an ardent listlessness," an intensity in repose. It may be the creative beautifying force in nature. It is the power which transforms mortal man into an immortal.

When "Endymion" was on the press, Keats wrote to his publisher saying that this passage about happiness had been ringing in his ears like "a chime a-mending" and he requested some

alterations. He then added that the poem was "a regular stepping-stone of the Imagination towards a truth. . . . It set before me the gradations of happiness even like a pleasure thermometer." Endymion thus exhibits a series of experiences which educate a youth in the higher life of beauty. Love is the dominant theme. But in addition to love there is a wide range of other emotions. There is aspiration after the celestial vision, devotion to the goddess, splendor in the subterranean labyrinth, awe before the shrine of Diana, charm in the arbor of Adonis, reverence in the moon worship, sympathy for Glaucus and the dead lovers, majesty in the palace of Neptune, grief in the story of the bacchante, abnegation in the resolution of Endymion to lead an ascetic life,—these and still more. "Endymion," therefore, portrays a succession of exalting emotions. In "Sleep and Poetry" Keats yearned for an education in the higher life. In this poem he has sought it and found it by means of the imagination. "All our passions in their sublime," he wrote Bailey in another letter, "are creative of essential beauty." In "Endymion" he played upon the various passions, like Timotheus upon the lyre, and he endeavored to raise them to their sublime.

With a little anticipation we may define his æsthetic philosophy even more clearly. In the packet of letters sent to his brother George in 1819, under the date of April 28, he indulged in a characteristic discussion of the effect of environment on character. "Call the world," he says, "the vale of soul-making. Then you will find out the use of the world." Then he argues thus. Human beings at birth are not souls, only intelligences. An intelligence has no peculiar individuality. A soul is an intelligence with the addition of individuality. An intelligence is transformed into a soul by the experience of the heart's emotions, and such experience is obtained by the discipline of joy and pain.

An illustration will enforce his meaning. If two minds had precisely the same knowledge of the theorems of Euclid and nothing more, they would lack distinguishing personalities. But if, with the knowledge, one had a distaste for Euclid and the other a relish, they would possess the differences of temperamental feeling which are the basis of personality.

The reasoning of Keats may then be reduced to the following simple propositions: —

A soul is an intelligence with individuality.

Individuality is the result of the emotional experience of the heart.

Our world is the schoolhouse for this emotional experience.

The value of this mortal life is, therefore, in the making of a soul by the uses of the world.

While this may all seem the speculation of an amateur, it is very vital to Keats. For his genius developed and wrought itself into poetry by extracting from life the æsthetic elements of personality. In æsthetics he sought salvation. For the future life he conceived to be a continuation of the sensations of this, only in finer tone. And in proof of the seriousness with which he held these views, he naïvely states to his brother, "I think it is a grander system of salvation than the Christian religion. It is a system of spirit-creation."

It is now possible to discern the exact meaning which Keats gave to the word "spiritualize." "Endymion" is an example of soul-making. The mysterious agencies guided the youth through his pilgrimage so that he might acquire beautiful things as a permanent possession of the spirit. These developed his callow intelligence into a soul, rich in beautiful memories, strong for the ills of earthly existence and exalted

for the celestial life above. Wordsworth in the "Excursion" — which Keats declared one of the three great things of the age — had constructed a philosophy in which "melancholy fear was subdued by faith" and man's lost joy was restored by the influence of nature. In "Endymion" Keats was working out a similar scheme of his own; he was endeavoring to find joy and to "spiritualize" a mortal being by the influence of pure beauty.

We must revise the former statement that the chief trait in Keats' poetry is "the relish for tidbits of fleeting pleasure." His ambition has outgrown the impulse of the volume of 1817. It has acquired a new dignity. It is no longer content with the ephemeral. His search is for beauty in order that beauty may create soul and fortify it by the permanent possession of joy.

XII

CRITICISM OF ENDYMION

WHY, then, is "Endymion" a failure?

During the composition Keats sometimes walked with his friends and recited passages with quiet enthusiasm. When the poem was done there came a reaction, the inevitable nausea, known to every creative artist. In this abnormal mood he wrote the preface, that curious blending of self-detraction, exaggeration and sane judgment. He told the truth when he said that the poem was "a feverish attempt" and not "a deed accomplished." He uttered wisdom when he wrote that the imagination of a boy is healthy and the mature imagination of a man is healthy, but that there is a time between in which the soul is in a state of ferment and mawkishness. Yet he exaggerated when he implied that this mawkishness is the prevailing flavor of the poem. It is only the element of weakness. The ferment of yeasting youth, in the evolution of genius, also produces strength.

Let us consider the strength. If "Endymion" cannot be saved as a poem, it may be worthy of honor as a human document about Keats.

The masculine mind is preëminently constructive; the feminine is finely perceptive. Genius has been declared essentially feminine. This is, of course, only a half-truth which emphasizes a characteristic, the delicate sensitivity of genius to impressions. Keats gave evidence of the feminine fineness of perception in his first volume. In "Endymion" it is immensely increased in range and quality. His faculties are more expert in detecting the elusive stimulus in nature, in transmuting the stimulus in older poetry. Lowell, one of the first to penetrate deep into Keats, speaks of "the flush of his fine senses and the flutter of his electrical nerves." Poets perceive the external world principally through the eyes. Keats is alert in all the senses. Touch, taste, odors, sounds are often equal in power to splendid vision. His whole body is alive, responsive like a sensitive film to the actinic rays beyond the violet. A thrill at the finger-tips quickens his consciousness into whirling forgetfulness. And this acuteness of feeling begets a craving for the luxurious. In "Endymion" he revels in feasts of dainties, mingled perfumes; the musk-rose amid

new-mown hay. He rests with languorous delight on couches of heaped-up flowers. This acuteness also craves the subtle. Plain manna, gathered by day, sufficed for the Hebrews. This poet-connoisseur would have it gathered under the cool magic of the stars. His language, too, commands the imagination with a larger dignity. Endymion's mind swims before the celestial image of Diana like one —

> Who dives three fathoms where the waters run,
> Gurgling in beds of coral.

Sometimes the sense of touch is described in terms of sight, as when the pilgrim in dream grazes the hand of Hebe with "dazzled lips." Sometimes the rapture of the body is conveyed by a powerful indirection: —

> Heaven shield thee for thine utter loveliness.

Brandes has been so impressed by this physical sensitivity of Keats that he writes his chapter under the caption of "The Poet of All-Embracing Sensuousness."

~~If this~~ were the whole matter, or even the most important, Keats might well be regarded as the parent of the æsthetic degenerates. Man cannot live by bread alone. And a close examination of "Endymion" will reveal the copiousness of a higher poetic faculty. "Without losing its sen-

suousness," says Lowell, "his poetry refined itself and grew more inward. The sensational was elevated into the typical by the control of *that finer sense* which underlies the senses and is the *spirit* of them." Here we touch the essence of his genius, the line along which the ferment will move toward the eternal art of the "Grecian Urn." He preserves the warmth of bodily pleasure while consecrating that pleasure to the service of the soul. A thing of beauty is a joy forever because the earthly delight is given wings and flies from the low level of the ground into the empyrean of the imagination, to abide there in exalted freedom.

The silent workings of the dawn —

here the glow of the air, the light, the cloud, the sky are elements of the dawn-rapture; but the mind perceives something beyond the reach of sense. The lark, at the festival of Pan, invisible, lost in the sunshine, is still the singing bird; it is also an unbodied joy. Zephyr, fondling the flowers "amid the sobbing rain"; Juliet at her window, "tenderly weaning her fancy from its maiden snow"; the Indian bacchante nursing Sorrow at her breast: —

There is not one,
No, no, not one
But thee to comfort a poor lonely maid;

> Thou art her mother,
> And her brother,
> Her playmate and her wooer in the shade, †

in these the mortal passion has been emancipated from the slavery of the flesh. Sensation lingers as sensation; yet it has been elevated into the domain of the soul.

One of the most daring examples of the language of earthly passion used for a metaphysical appeal is the passage about music: —

> Hist, when the airy stress
> Of music's kiss impregnates the free winds,
> And with a sympathetic touch unbinds
> Æolian magic from their lucid wombs.

Such instances of transmutation are numerous in "Endymion." The poem is not a mere collection of odors, tastes, dazzling colors and nerve-thrills which cause lovers to swoon. And when De Quincey called it a piece of folly, "full of affectation, false vapoury sentiment and fantastic effeminacy," he made only a partial report. The poetic faculty of Keats is becoming increasingly *alchemic*. If he is the poet of all-embracing sensuousness, he is equally the poet of all-embracing supersensuousness. His genius is passing from the real to the sublimity of the ideal. He may dine with Epicurus; but he worships with Plato.

Nothing that Keats wrote afterward shows such fertility, such an abundance of the raw materials of poetry. Why, then, is "Endymion" a failure?

The critical judgment has condemned it on three counts: the language is often a willful offense to good usage;[1] the narrative is involved and obscure; the style is gaudy with lavish ornament. All these, however, will be comprehended under a general indictment which indicates the fundamental defect in the poet and the poem. "Endymion" fails because of a constant confusion of values.

Keats sought for the æsthetic appeal in everything. Wordsworth sought for the moral appeal in everything. Just as the older poet forced the moral issue on a spade and a kitten playing with falling leaves, so the younger has forced the æsthetic with similar lapses of discretion. The "toying" with fingers is infantile. The gentle "squeeze" in the midst of an ecstasy is humorous. The "tasting" of a face is ludicrous. "Pleasure's nipple" and "milky sovereignties" are grotesque. Even that superb picture of

[1] W. T. Arnold, after a careful study of Keats' vocabulary, concludes that nine tenths of the supposed coinages of words were revivals from former poets.

Oceanus, passing into oblivion, is marred by the mixed metaphor of the submarine realm as a sheepfold. There is confusion in the individual lines. Moreover, if the successive incidents of the poem set before the author "gradations of happiness, even like a pleasure thermometer," the reader cannot discern the rising scale. The emotions which play upon Endymion are certainly ordered indiscriminately. There is no semblance of climax. The last book is the weakest of the four. There is confusion of values in the arrangement of parts all through.

This confusion is most striking in the conception of the characters. A pining lover, incapable of self-determined action, cannot be made successfully the protagonist of an epic. Endymion fails as a man; he lacks will. A goddess cannot act like a nymph, with the love-lorn weaknesses of an earthly maid, without losing her celestial dignity. Diana fails as a deity; she lacks divine reserve. In both characters, where infatuation is unrelieved by any intellectual force of personality, the effect is necessarily mawkish. Keats confused amorousness with real passion. The leading motive of his poem, therefore, could not command deference or stir enthusiasm. He overestimated the possibilities of his theme; at least

his own powers of creation within the limits of such a fable. After the poem was finished he saw that his mistake was insuperable. He refused to redraft it, as futile, and preferred to let "the youngster die."

Judged by the finished products of the masters, "Endymion" as a whole is dead. Yet parts may be treasured like the Elgin marbles, and the sum of its parts is greater than the whole. But whatever the fate of the poem or its fragments as art, it is certainly a rich living autobiography of Keats during the happiest, the most energetic year of his life. During this time he came into the unrestricted possession of his great inheritance of genius. From inexperience, not from native vice, he proceeded to spend that wealth foolishly. He was a prodigal son, wasting his substance in riotous living. He soon perceived his folly and became wise. Therein lies the moving beauty of the story of the prodigal son.

XIII

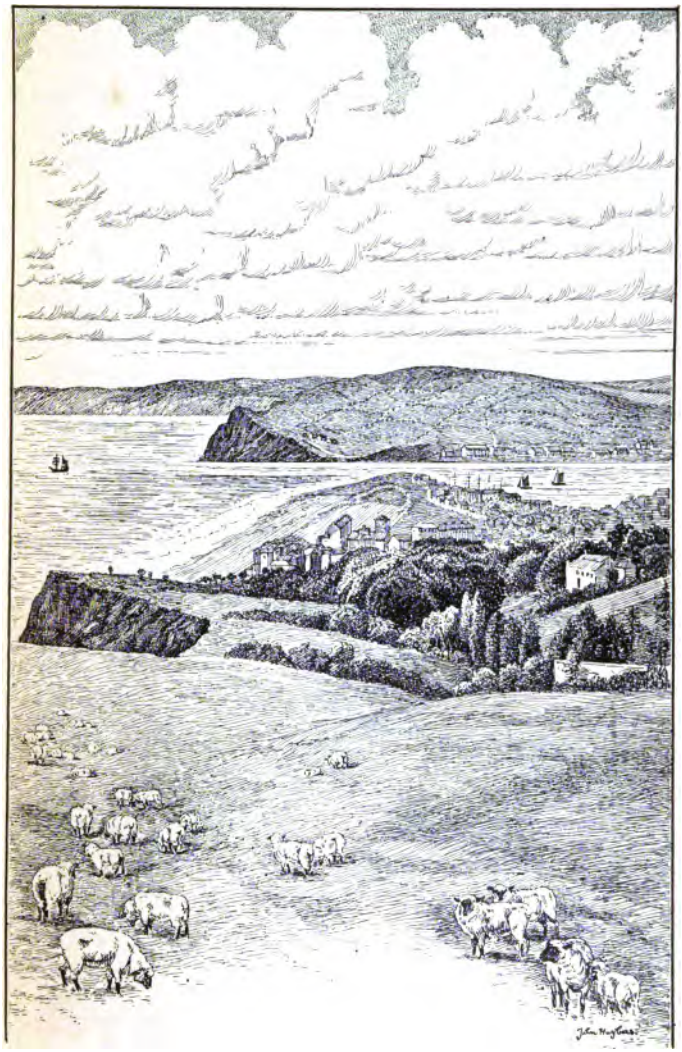
ISABELLA

In Devonshire, after the release from "Endymion," Keats wrote some occasional verse and a poem that is a part of his enduring fame. The "Ode to Maia," an exquisite fragment, expresses the sufficiency of art for the artist and reveals the ancient mood of the Greeks for religion. It breathes the easeful content with the passing day, another evidence of his paganism. For though he longed for immortality, his mind was not vexed by the tremendous eternities of Christian theology. The joy of the ancients entranced him. "I never cease to wonder at all that incarnate delight," he once said to Severn. "It is an immortal youth, just as there is no Now or Then for the Holy Ghost."

Besides this fragment there are several songs of graceful erotic laxity. One reads them, as coming from the author of "Hyperion," with a slight qualm of regret. Keats is too near us, too much like ourselves. Time gives the sanction of

other ages and other manners; it has done this for Herrick and the amorous Elizabethans. A hundred years hence these trifles by Keats may be read with similar pleasure as the pardonable byplay of a genius. He never authorized their publication.

The chief poem of the Devonshire cycle is "Isabella." Nothing else shows so strikingly the detachment of the author from his immediate environment. It was written during that spring of continual rain; "the hills are very beautiful, when you get sight of 'em — the primroses are out but then you are in." Nevertheless, the poem has all the dry warm bright languor of Italian skies. Here Keats has again submitted his senses to the luxurious. The joy of the lovers is as the flush of June. They meet at twilight in a bower of hyacinth and musk. The parting is like two fragrant roses blown apart. Here, also, there is a sustained subtlety of sensation. After the tragedy Isabella spreads her perfect arms upon the air and clasps the mind-made image of her lover, while the ghost of the dead in his "dismal forest hearse" is warmed by the consciousness of her brooding anguish. The glove of the murdered man chills her breast to the bone, and the silken scarf in which she wraps the severed



TEIGNMOUTH IN DEVONSHIRE

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head (Boccaccio speaks only of a napkin) is redolent of the flowers of Arabia. Keats shows a great advance in discriminating taste. There is, relatively, very little confusion of values in this poem. That preface to "Endymion" caused a clearing-up. Virile strength has not yet come. The languor still prevails. But the tone has passed above indiscretion and mawkishness.

A comparison with Boccaccio's tale will demonstrate how consciously solicitous Keats has been to inform the sensuousness with that finer suggestion which, as Lowell said, is the *spirit* of the senses. In Boccaccio Lorenzo has been a common libertine and Isabella, in her abandon, visits his chamber, stolen-wise, at night. The maid is the conventional *tercero*. In "Isabella" the attendant is an old watchful nurse. Keats has lifted the story from the level of a vulgar liaison to that of the virgin innocence of courtship. In addition he has deliberately chosen descriptive terms which infuse the atmosphere with holiness. Lorenzo is a young *palmer* of love. He fears to offend by an unhallowed touch. He dreams of his beloved as a *bride*. His love, at the height of desire, begs to be *shriven*. The warmth of feeling is restrained by reverence. As the passion increases, it grows *tenderer*. Happiness

begins with a kiss and suspends with a kiss at evening. When they separate Isabella's joy continues in singing and Lorenzo consoles himself with the glory of the sunset. The love impulse, while craving gratification, is ruled by an unselfish regard for the other's welfare. Finally the real burden of the poem is not amorous delight, — it is loyalty to the dead.

We should fix definitely Keats' conception of love at this time. That superficial condemnation which identifies the passion with honey, ecstasies and swoons will not stand close scrutiny. His conception changes as his powers expand.

In "Endymion" he described love as "an ardent listlessness." He added a caution that it is more than "the mere commingling of passionate breath." It is a "sovereign power," superior to the woes of Troy or the death-day of empires. It subordinates ambition and fame and makes man's mortal being immortal. Yet it is not heroic, of the stuff that drove a Lovelace, for honor's sake, to leave Lucasta for the wars. The "ardent listlessness" is a resignation to intense emotion, heedless of earthly responsibility. It liberates. The sublime passion is invested with peace, like the evening star burning in the ethereal calm of twilight.

The love of Lorenzo and Isabella is not characteristically Italian. In some provinces, among the lower classes, a poet of Italian parentage tells us,[1] the girls carry knives in their garters. The jealousy of an Italian lover is proverbially blind and quick in the destruction of its idol. Among the higher classes, if Romeo and Juliet be authentically Italian, romantic love surges impetuously and rushes to its object with resolution and daring courage. Keats' conception of love in "Isabella" has neither this self-centred brutality nor this executive audacity. It is only a static emotion. There is no attraction of intellectual affinity, no analysis of complemental personalities. The tone of purity is maintained by aloofness from base appetite and by the atmosphere of reverence. Neither sought to force a selfish will beyond the line of mutual desire. Here is another reason why women of fine grain admire the poetry of Keats. For this forcing of desire, even under the ritual, has been an unvoiced tragedy of womanhood since the days of the Cave-man.

The poem has defects: some digression, some undue insistence on alien matters, an element of gruesomeness. The last is due to the essential

[1] Rossetti's *Last Confession.*

motive in Boccaccio's story, and not to any predilection of Keats for Ford and the Elizabethan decadents. In spite of these minor flaws, "Isabella" shows an astonishing advance toward perfection. The poet has almost mastered a mature style; the lines are crystallizing into impeccable finality. The description of the slaves, gathering "the rich-ored driftings of the flood"; the absent lover prisoned "in dungeon climes"; the autumn wind as "a roundelay of death among the leaves"; the wild eyes of the ghost of Lorenzo, "dewy bright with love"; the influence of those eyes in keeping

> All phantom fear aloof
> From the poor girl by the magic of their light,—

these gleams of elusive perfection are no longer sporadic. They follow almost as consistently as the links of a chain. And there is in the metal almost no alloy of bad taste.

Mr. Forman has picked "Isabella" as the masterpiece of Keats. Mr. Robert Bridges, with a cry of "ægritude," has damned it with faint praise. Absolute criticism is contentious, too often only a joust of caprices. It is far more profitable to perceive than to publish fiats. In this study we shall waive the rights of the absolute critic for the sake of seeing Keats play out his

forces in the struggle for self-realization. "In 'Endymion,'" he said, "I plunged headlong into the sea and thereby have become better acquainted with the soundings, the quicksands and the rocks." With "Isabella" he emerged with a clear sense of his bearings and found a firm footing on the territory over which he was to rule. He has begun to be a great poet by any test.

XIV

THE SCOTCH TOUR

THE radius of Keats' movements has been extremely short. He made frequent changes of place, yet always within the limits of cultivated nature. He lived practically in a garden with occasional glimpses of the sea. He had never beheld nature beyond the dominion of man, austere, sublime in solitude. It was Wordsworth's poetry, doubtless, that awoke his desire for the mountains and the mystery of the wilds. By the northern tour he hoped to get new strength and a wider range of poetic imagination.

Charles Armitage Brown, now his chief friend and housemate, went with him. Brown was nine years older, bald, bearded, corpulent, with conspicuous spectacles. He had lived in Russia, possessed a small income and dabbled in literature. Keats declared that his muse was the devil. He was a man of the world, something of a sybarite and a ribald. Though he could not

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touch the genius of the poet, he loved the man loyally and aided him, like Bailey, in acquiring poise and common-sense.

At Liverpool Keats bade farewell to his brother George and his wife, who were about to emigrate to Kentucky. The two travelers then started for a tramp of the Lake country. They called at Rydal Mount, but found Wordsworth absent, electioneering for the Conservatives. Bad weather prevented the ascent of Helvellyn. They climbed Skiddaw, visited Derwentwater and the cataract of Lodore. At the cataract Keats saw the rocks "fledged" with trees which gave the suggestion for the lines in the "Ode to Psyche," so enthusiastically praised by Ruskin. At Penrith he found the Druid stones, afterward a powerful figure for the defeated Titans in "Hyperion." The tourists crossed to Ireland. There Keats' most vivid memory was a squalid beldame, smoking a pipe, in a "dog-kennel" sedan chair. They soon returned to Scotland and the Burns country. Ailsa Rock, beheld offshore in a drizzle, brought a dramatic, almost alarming impression of the deluge. Ayrshire filled Keats with delight. "The bonny Doon is the sweetest river I ever saw," he wrote Tom. The mountains of Arran caused him to wonder why they did not incite

"the bardie" to produce an epic. He approached the home of Burns in a mood of self-annihilation. But reverence was disenchanted by vulgar realism. "Oh, the flummery of a birthplace! Cant! Cant! Cant!" There was "a mahogany-faced old jackass" hanging around who had known the poet, and "his gab hindered my sublimity." It was the misery of Burns among such banal countrymen that filled Keats with the deepest emotion.

Loch Lomond and Loch Awe gave the pedestrians some sensations of grandeur. The trip across the island of Mull was a severe strain of endurance. They tramped, stockings in hand, over miles of bog. Keats began to suffer from an inflamed throat. They sailed to Iona, beheld the ruins of St. Columba and the graves of the sixty-one kings. Thence to Fingal's Cave. "It far surpasses the finest cathedral," Keats records. And in some verses by the way he declares that it surpasses the vision of St. John on Patmos. Fingal's Cave supplied another fine image for "Hyperion," in which Saturn and Thea sit—

> Postured motionless,
> Like natural sculpture in cathedral cavern.

The climax of the journey, however, was the ascent of Ben Nevis, with the glimpses into its

sheer dark chasms. This is the highest mountain in Scotland. Keats was so deeply affected that he resolved never to ascend another mountain in the British empire. "These chasms are fifteen hundred feet in depth and are the most tremendous places I have ever seen. We tumbled in large stones and set the echoes at work." The sonnet, written amid the whirling mists of the summit, addresses the mountain as the symbol of man's mental darkness. The moods of Keats were very flexible. The letter containing the solemn description of Ben Nevis is full of jocularities. He jests at the shifting caps of mist as more changeable than the fashions of women's bonnets. He makes merry over the toils of climbing. "I have said nothing yet of our getting on among the loose stones, large and small, sometimes on two, sometimes on three, sometimes four legs — sometimes two and stick, sometimes three and stick, then four again, then two, then a jump, so that we kept on ringing changes on foot, hand, stick, jump, boggle, stumble, foot, hand, foot (very gingerly), stick again, and then again on all fours."

Shortly afterward his throat became so ulcerated that a doctor advised him against further exposure. Leaving Brown, he took a sailing

packet at Cromarty for home. Nine days later a strange figure with fur cap, plaid shawl, ragged clothes and a knapsack appeared before the astonished friends in London. His face was flushed with fever. He had traveled a thousand miles, six hundred on foot, in all kinds of weather, and the break in health was the beginning of the end.

This cost of the northern tour was greater than the gain. He had seen mountains; but Keats was not to be a poet of mountains. "The first mountains I saw weighed solemnly upon me," he wrote Bailey. "The effect is wearing away." The trip had not established any new current of poetic feeling. Of all the poems of the Scotch cycle only two sonnets arrest a profound mood. He did not find amid the hills "the presence that disturbs" or "the spirit that impels all thinking things." Keats had laid the lines of "Tintern Abbey" close to his heart. Nevertheless this Scotch trip demonstrated that he had no vein of mysticism. A Wordsworth, with his intense concentration, would have observed from a single narrow channel of thought. Keats' personality was too open, too adaptable, too sensitive to everything for the mystic's detachment from tangible realities.

VIEW FROM THE SUMMIT OF BEN NEVIS

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The letters reveal a temperament of alert curiosity and pliant sympathy. They show an all-inclusive grasp of details. His sight is quick for peculiarities of men and manners. He writes two pages full of sharp discriminations between the Irish and the Scotch character. His attention is easily diverted. His head is in a whirl from considering "the million likings and antipathies of our moments." He exclaims, "Oh, scenery, that thou shouldst be crushed between two puns!" He turns from scenery to feast his eyes upon a group of children, "some beautiful faces and one exquisite mouth." He was keenly alive to the irritations of gadflies, the bag-pipe, "the cursed oat cake" and the thousand and one incidents of tramping.

The tour broadened his mind with experience, undoubtedly. Yet this experience was not such as he could use in his poetry to any extent. The Scotch cycle of verse contains only two things of fine finish, the sonnet on "Ailsa Rock" and the ballad on "Meg Merriles." The northern scenery did not stimulate his creative genius. It was too cold, too rugged, for one who fed his hunger on images of warmth and luxury. The call of the wilds is the call of mystery or of energy. Keats is still a poet of indolent repose. He would have

gathered far more poetic material in Italy. For all this, though the cost was too great, the visit to Scotland was of some benefit. The very ruggedness of the scenery was a tonic to his natural love of richness and languor. In the work that comes after there is an ever-increasing austerity of style. And the triumphant "Hyperion" has the strength of the hills.

XV

THE ATTACKS OF THE REVIEWS

KEATS arrived in London on August 18, 1818. Worn out, broken in health, he had to stand up immediately against the onslaughts of rabid enemies. The article by the anonymous "Z" had just appeared in "Blackwood's"; that by Gifford in the "Quarterly" came out in September.

Every progressive study of Keats must include this story of the reviews. The attack of the Tory critics was the storm centre of his life. The evidence of the effect seems conflicting, and the last word has not been said on the matter. He has been seen long enough through an atmosphere of pathos. It is time to end this sentimental pity, for it obscures the man. In "Sleep and Poetry," after wishing for experience in the pleasures of life, he continued: —

> And can I ever bid these joys farewell?
> Yes, I must pass them for a nobler life,

> Where I may find the agonies, the strife
> Of human hearts.

He got exactly what he then desired, the agony and the stiffening of the fibre. Read the full story and pity will give place to admiration.

Keats suffered, no doubt. The blows of the critics had the mass power of public opinion. "I have the advantage," wrote the enemy in a previous article against Hunt. "I have the established sentiments of national honor on my side. There is not a man or woman around us who venerates the memory of respectable ancestry or the interests of a yet unpolluted progeny that will not rejoice to see your poison neutralized by the wholesome chemistry of 'Z.'" He next declared that he purposed to relieve the main attack against Hunt by diversions against "the Keateses, the Shellys, the Webbes." In crushing "the Cockney School" the writer, voicing the triumphant forces of reaction, was suppressing the last vestiges of "the Encyclopædists in religion and the Jacobins in politics." This must not be regarded as literary criticism. It was a cry of "no quarter" and a slaughter of the survivors of the Revolution.

Politics caused the malevolence. Hunt was still fighting for liberalism. Since his party was

down and under, he had to force that fighting. He did this with a free use of the technical terms of the day. He called Gifford "a servile court tool"; Southey "canting hypocrite"; Coleridge "the wandering Jew of literature"; and his pen sketch of the Regent was pronounced *lèse majesté* by the court. Those in authority did not fail to use their advantage. They had monarchy and the church to defend. One highflier went so far as to demand obedience to the sovereign, even though he were a Nero. The spirit of reform, during the decade after Waterloo, was still regarded as treason.

Keats, though liberal in opinion, was quiescent and politically harmless. But his attachment to Hunt gave him the black brand. His fortunes as a poet were thus allied with the fortunes of Hunt as a politician. The criticism of his verse was made in the midst of a larger conflict where hate and the destructive zeal of battle ignored the artistic issue. Keats had to drink his own cup of wormwood and also the gall delivered to Hunt.

There were some grounds of literary opposition. The public taste still held to the correctness and conventionalism of Pope. Wordsworth, with his simplicity and sincerity, was slowly educating

taste to a different standard. He was then tolerated. But Scott and Byron, neither antagonistic to Pope,—the one a Tory, the other a lord,—had the vogue. And these poets were both intensely masculine. The Cockney School stood for a new standard of excellence that seemed feminine. The style was not simple, and apparently not sincere. It was ornate, often forced to the limits of affectation. In war-times the masculine spirit is contemptuous of feminine virtues on the field. Very naturally, then, this new style excited hostility; and it was attacked, of course, at its weakest points.

The reviews were authoritative and powerful. They were the chief agency by which an author reached his public. They certainly did destroy Keats' reputation for a time; yet just as certainly, by their violence, they kept his name alive until Tennyson came with his fine art and poetry of peace. That was the age for Keats. His birth was premature both in body and spirit.

The masculine spirits, still combative, fell afoul of him and tried to dispatch him. The reviews, especially "Blackwood's," created a phantom, called it "Johnny Keats," and made it stalk and play the maudlin idiot on the stage of vulgarities, obscenities, horrors, which they had

dressed up for Hunt. The maudlin idiot was bad enough; but the malignant cruelty cannot be fully appreciated until the phantom is seen on that stage.

Hampstead forms the background. It is pictured as a hotbed of treason and immorality. Those who infested this resort were devoid of patriotism and religion. Their habits were depraved. In life and writings they flaunted atheism, railed at marriage, upheld wife-desertion, glorified adultery and eulogized incest. Hunt was set on a throne as the king of Cockaigne; a man of low birth, vulgar manners, presumptuous in the affectation of culture. He was "a universal sore of vanity"; his intellect was "prostrated and enslaved to the harlot deity." He was the Cockney Homer; Haydon was the Cockney Raphael; Hazlitt was the Cockney Aristotle. Keats, "the amiable but infatuated bardling," was caricatured as Æsculapius, dogging the king's heels and seeking to stuff flattering sonnets into his waistcoat. Out of this court proceeded hatred of all the sacred traditions of life. The infidels reveled in grossness and voluptuousness and cherished a profligate ambition to ruin society.

These were the conventional tactics of partisan

journalism: the magnification of slight pretexts into monstrosities and the publication of rumors that were essentially lies. Keats was thus portrayed to the public as a weak-minded member of a set of anarchists and free-lovers. And the public, in those days, had not learned to read the papers with the grain of salt.

Now for the assaults made upon Keats alone.

Gifford was doubtless an honest fighter. Rossetti speaks of his article as a despicable act of brutalism. Let justice be done to Gifford. He was blind, but not abusive. He treated Keats with contempt, yet he cited real grounds for scorn. He collated the offensive things like a scholar and printed them for his reader. He confessed that he had read only the first book of "Endymion" and found that unintelligible. He admitted "powers of language, rays of fancy, gleams of genius." The characteristics of Hunt's style he found accentuated in Keats. He called him "the simple neophyte" of Hunt and asserted that he more than "rivaled the master in the insanity of his poetry." But at the close he held his judgment as reversible and his mind as open to the light. This is the assumed candor of a bigot. Gifford was a professional advocate, hard-headed and hard-hearted. He deserves the

discredit that belongs to the advocate who poses as a critic. From the advocate's standpoint, everything he said, except one misquotation, was substantially true. There was a little exaggeration, yet no abuse.

But the anonymous "Z" in "Blackwood's,"—and the truth about Scott's part in the affair is that he was a mere spectator who advised abstinence, relished the wit and made light of the brutality,[1]—the anonymous "Z" was scurrilous.

[1] This, I believe, is a fair statement of Scott's rôle in the imbroglio. The "old incredible suspicion," as Mr. Lang puts it, of his active complicity was based on Hunt's imagination and confirmed, seemingly, by Severn's story of Scott's remorse in Rome. Mr. Lang, in his Life of Lockhart, i, 150–155 and 193–200, has proved that Scott was not a coadjutor in the attack. Lockhart first met Scott personally in June, 1818. They became intimate during the summer. On the 8th of October, at Abbotsford, Scott, introducing Lockhart to Lord Melville, remarked, referring to Blackwood, "I trust you have had enough of certain pranks with your friend Ebony." The allusion must have included the Keats article which had recently appeared. Lockhart records that Scott "disapproved (though he chuckled over it) the reckless extravagance of juvenile satire." One writer says, in this connection, that "a chuckle from Scott, in the blaze of his reputation, was all that men needed to instigate them." The matter evidently weighed heavily on Scott's mind. In 1820 he wrote Lockhart a long letter, earnestly urging him to abandon personal satire altogether. In it he condones what has been done as "a frolic of young men" and says, "'The gambol has been shown' — let it suffice." This attitude of tolerance where he should have been

He wrote out of a heart of hate. Keats was classed with farm servants, footmen and governesses who had been infected with the poetic "malady" by the success of Burns and Joanna Baillie. The "phrensy" of the first volume was bad, though not so bad as "the calm settled imperturbable driveling idiocy of 'Endymion.'" "Good Johnny Keats" had been induced by Hunt to quit his gallipots, and he had written "prurient and vulgar lines, evidently for some young lady east of Temple Bar." As a surgeon he might have made an excellent citizen. "It is a better and a wiser thing to be a starved apothecary than a starved poet. So back to thy shop, Mr. John; stick to plasters, pills and ointment boxes. But for Heaven's sake be a little more sparing of extenuatives and soporifics in your practice than you have been in your poetry." The chemical reagent of "Z" was vitriol flung at the face. And the general public, as one article came out after another, watched him fling it with tacit approval.

indignant probably accounts for his agitation when Severn unwittingly showed him Keats' picture in Rome. The fine grain in Scott's manliness, made more sensitive by Keats' tragic death and by the mistaken notion that the reviews had killed him, doubtless caused him twinges of conscience; for he had thoughtlessly minimized brutality into a prank and had given to cruelty the sanction of a smile.

How far was Keats vulnerable?

Three things, especially, established a fiction that Keats died crushed by the reviews: Shelley's "Adonais"; the unwarranted inscription on the tomb; Byron's flippant doggerel:—

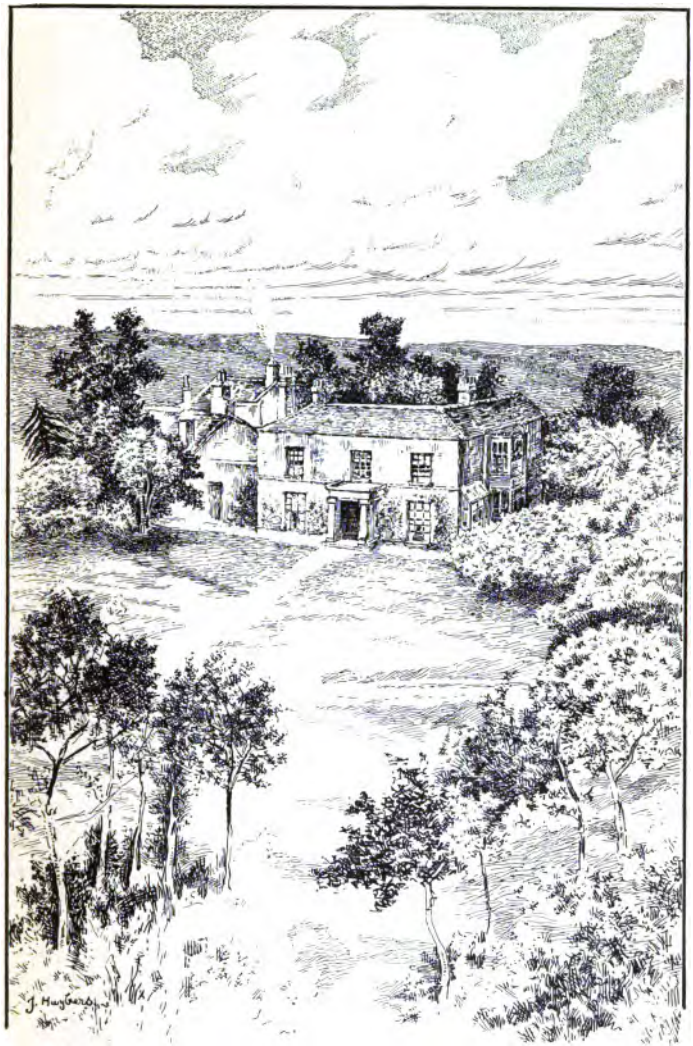
> "Who kill'd John Keats?"
> "I," says the Quarterly,
> So savage and Tartarly;
> "'T was one of my feats."

It required a long time to destroy that fiction, and its ghost is not yet wholly laid. A few years ago a critic of discretion considered the case as still open to argument.

Why should Keats break under such abuse when Hunt, a much weaker man, stood up against far worse? The answer is that he did not break, but that undeniably he did suffer more. The reason is found in the two different natures. The "sweet Master Shallow" who took prison life so airily with his piano and kid-glove promenades lacked the capacity to feel deeply. Keats was a soul of intensity. His finer profounder nature had a far greater capacity for pain. He was therefore more vulnerable.

In estimating this vulnerability, however, a distinction must be made between the effect on the sensibilities and the effect on the will.

Therein lies the vital point of the whole matter, the test of the man. Lady Macbeth and Macbeth were both subject to terrifying hallucinations. Under the strain the mind of the woman was shattered, while the man became resolute, executive. Keats had a combination of feminine sensibilities and masculine will. In his mobile imagination he was fearfully shaken and driven often into moods of self-distrust and despair. It could not be otherwise with such a fine-grained sensitive nature. He suffered agonies. Nevertheless the evidence is quite conclusive that his will was stimulated into greater self-sufficiency and strength. He actually drank the delight of battle. For him the attack of the reviews was what Carlyle calls "The Baphometic Fire-Baptism." Hitherto Keats, although growing into wisdom, has been floundering about trying to find his stable equilibrium. His artistic temperament has been in an amorphous state. Hostile criticism was the crucible in which this temperament was fused and transformed into a crystallized character.



HUNT'S HOUSE IN HAMPSTEAD HEATH

XVI

THE REVELATION OF CHARACTER

"I MUST *think that difficulties nerve the spirit of a man — they make his Prime Objects a Refuge as well as a Passion.*"

Keats wrote these words — they should be printed in gold — in the days of his first high hopes. After the return from Scotland he had the opportunity of putting them into practice. He was in financial straits. The tour left him physically exhausted and ill. In this frail condition he nursed his dying brother, night and day; watched the life slowly fade until the end came in December. All the while his imagination was haunted by the phantom of "Johnny Keats" and his ambition bore the load of a blasted reputation and a blasted hope of recognition. Five forces were thus operating during that autumn to break him down: finances, ill-health, the loss of a brother, an obsession of ridicule, foiled

ambition. Now let us see how rumor, aided by Keats' reticence, added high colors to the tragedy of his death.

During that autumn Severn saw him occasionally and noted his strained eyes, his face haggard with apathy and despair. Haydon wrote in his journal that Keats would come to his studio, sit for hours without saying a word, and that he finally took to prolonged dissipation for relief. This last is strange. It is supported by no one else. Keats is always spoken of as a man of very temperate habits. It is surely incredible that he could have been, as Haydon says, "for six weeks scarcely sober," when he was assiduously nursing his brother during the autumn, and when, during the following winter, he was in the first transports of his love for Fanny Brawne. But whether dissipated or not, from a combination of causes he was noticeably despondent. The moods of depression gave rise to rumors; he threatened suicide; his mental suffering caused a rupture of blood-vessels in the lungs; the ridicule of the reviewers had driven him insane. After his death these rumors passed to Shelley in Italy. With Hotspur indignation, he passed them on to Byron. Byron's doggerel and satiric stanza in "Don Juan" gave a quotable

form and wide circulation to the fiction that Keats was killed by abusive criticism. The poet's closest friends confirmed it for posterity. For when they set the headpiece for his tomb, ignoring or misconceiving his last request, they put on the stone: —

THIS GRAVE
CONTAINS ALL THAT WAS MORTAL
OF A
YOUNG ENGLISH POET
WHO
ON HIS DEATH BED
IN THE BITTERNESS OF HIS HEART
AT THE MALICIOUS POWER OF HIS ENEMIES
DESIRED
THIS PHRASE TO BE ENGRAVED ON HIS TOMBSTONE
HERE LIES ONE
WHOSE NAME WAS WRIT IN WATER

There the legend continues to this day, in letters of marble, misrepresenting the fate of the man beneath. Brown is chiefly responsible. He repented before he died, but did not repair the mistake.

Such in brief is the history of the apochryphal tragedy of Keats' assassination by the reviews. We shall not here anticipate the last moments of Keats or interpret properly his dying request.

But let us look squarely at the facts contemporary with this year as sufficient for the present.

He was bruised in his dignity; he was stung in his acute sensibilities; he was driven into temporary moods of self-distrust. For a time he considered abandoning poetry and turning again to medicine or emigrating to America. The suffering was in the morbid brooding of the imagination. Poets are especially subject to it. The faculty that creates is a faculty that suffers. The imagination is the poet's rack of anguish as well as his chamber of joy. The test of Keats' character is not the pain, but the reaction from the blows. Criticism did not break or even bend his will. Criticism made him more cautious, more independent. He became a spiritual anchorite. He was drawn into a closer communion with that invisible company which was always the highest source of his inspiration, "the eternal Being, the Principle of Beauty and the Memory of Great Men." With these he lost his eagerness for fame and put aside the vainglory of the world. "My imagination is a monastery and I am its monk."

Evidence that is recorded without any thought of future use is the best evidence. The letters that Keats wrote to his friends (not for publi-

cation or posterity) reveal the truth. Consider some of these and see what was happening in the depths of his nature while the reviews were supposed to be driving him insane. The attacks came in August and September; these are the reactions from the blows.

September 21st. "I wish I could say Tom was any better. His identity presses upon me so all day that I am obliged to go out — and although I intended to have given some time to study alone, I am obliged to write and plunge into abstract images to ease myself of his countenance, his voice and his feebleness — so that I live now in a continual fever."

September 22d. "I never was in love — yet the voice and shape of a Woman has haunted me these two days. . . . There is an awful warmth about my heart like a load of Immortality. Poor Tom — that woman — and Poetry were ringing changes in my senses."

October 9th. "I begin to get a little acquainted with my own strength and weakness — praise or blame has but a momentary effect on the man whose love of beauty in the abstract makes him a severe critic on his own Works. My own domestic criticism has given me pain without comparison beyond what 'Blackwood's' or the

'Quarterly' could possibly inflict. . . . I will write independently — I have written independently *without judgment.* I may write independently, and *with judgment,* hereafter. The Genius of Poetry must work out its own salvation in a man: it cannot be matured by law and precept, but by sensation and watchfulness in itself. . . . I was never afraid of failure; for I would sooner fail than not be among the greatest."

October 14th. "I think I shall be among the English Poets after my death."

October 16th. "I shall send you more than letters — I mean a tale — which I must begin on account of the activity of my mind; of its inability to remain at rest."

October 25th. "My solitude is sublime. The roaring of the wind is my wife and the stars through the window-pane are my children. The mighty abstract idea I have of Beauty in all things stifles the more divided and minute domestic happiness. . . . I feel more and more every day as my imagination strengthens, that I do not live in this world alone but in a thousand worlds — No sooner am I alone than shapes of epic greatness are stationed around me and serve my Spirit the office which is equivalent to a king's

BUST OF KEATS, ST. JOHN'S CHURCH, HAMPSTEAD

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bodyguard. . . . The only thing that can affect me personally for more than one short passing day, is any doubt about my powers of poetry — I seldom have any, and I look with hope to the nighing time when I shall have none."

October 27th. "The faint conceptions I have of poems to come bring the blood frequently to my forehead. . . . I feel assured I should write from the mere yearning and fondness I have for the beautiful, even if my night's labors should be burnt every morning and no eye ever shine upon them."

These are a few of the outpourings during the weeks that followed the savage castigation. "Poor fellow," wrote Haydon in his diary, "his genius had no sooner begun to bud than hatred and malice spat their poison on its leaves and, sensitive and young, it shriveled beneath their effusions."

> Strange that the soul, that very fiery particle,
> Should let itself be snuffed out by an article,

sneered Byron. And the corpulent wit in Edinburgh wrote a mock-heroic sonnet in Italian.

The absolutely convincing evidence which refutes Haydon's nonsense and all other such nonsense is the indisputable fact that while Keats was supposedly insane and meditating suicide,

he was actually projecting and writing the poems which have given him his title to genius of the first order. He began "Hyperion" immediately after his brother's death and worked on it through the winter. In February, 1819, he wrote "The Eve of St. Agnes" and the fragment of "St. Mark." In the spring following he composed the odes to "Psyche," the "Grecian Urn" and the "Nightingale"; in the summer, with steaming rapidity, the tragedy of "Otho the Great." He closed this, his most fertile year of creation, with "Lamia" and the "Ode to Autumn." How woefully his genius had shriveled and how completely his soul had been snuffed out by an article!

A corollary might be added to this demonstration. As usually happens, the expression of Keats' genius lagged behind his character. He was a much manlier and brainier fellow than the young men in "Isabella," "The Eve of St. Agnes," and "Lamia." "Hyperion" and the great odes do more justice to his character and his brains. The stuff was in him; time was necessary to get it in motion. The abusive criticism was one of the most fortunate influences in his career. It brought him selfhood and energy from the recoil. It preserved his memory, when

it might have been lost, by the sympathetic appeal of the supposed martyrdom. It offered the dramatic crisis in which he displayed his strength of character.

"I must think that difficulties nerve the spirit of a man — they make his Prime Objects a Refuge as well as a Passion."

XVII

"JUNKETS"

WHILE the phantom of "Johnny Keats" was a farcical dumb-show in the public imagination, the reality was a gracious companionable young man, known among his intimates as "Junkets." The nickname was a tribute to his prevailing good-humor. Great men, long after death, are usually set in a rosy limelight and written about sentimentally. Keats deserves his aura of fame. But let us, for the moment, hold hero-worship in abeyance and see him in the common light of day, — as one who ate mutton chops, walked down Cheapside, climbed into stage coaches; chatted, bantered and took his diversions with his friends. Of all the English poets — the *genus irritabile* — he was one of the pleasantest to live with.

"I got to the stage half an hour before it set out," he writes his sister, "and I counted the buns and tarts in a Pastry-cook's window and

was just beginning with the jellies." He found interest in her many trifles. He asked her to keep a diary of all her little doings; and he dreamed of the days when he should have a home for her and the two could read this diary together. The devotion of Keats to this orphan child is one of the grace notes in his character. The pure warm affection for his brother George's wife is another.

The letters are full of amusement derived from domestic details; Mrs. Dilke's medicine, Mrs. Hunt's skill in tearing linen, Mrs. Shelley's deftness in cutting bread. But Keats was no lady's man. He had no youthful romances. He felt, as a rule, uneasy in the presence of women. They had no power over his mind. Bluestockings he detested particularly. Keats was a man's man wholly. He loved to smoke. He drank wine with relish; sometimes until he was "pleasantly tipsy." Unlike Lamb he committed no indiscretions in his cups. Claret — "'t is the only palate affair I am at all sensual in" — made him feel peaceful. He enjoyed rough sports. He went to a bear-baiting. He saw the prize-fight between Randal and Turner. And he fought a man himself for some act of brutality. His favorite joke was a Dogberry touch from one of the novel-

ists. "Some one says to the serjeant: 'That's a *non sequitur*.' 'If you come to that,' replies the serjeant, 'you're another.'" Occasionally he would indulge in a practical joke. That on Brown and his tenant is surely excusable, — too good to forget.

Keats' normal vein of humor was sportiveness. He amused his fancy by conjuring up such grotesque images as Voltaire in steel armor, Alexander in a nightcap and Socrates tying a cravat. The letters are often revels of jest and merriment, heaped-up jocularities about trivial matters. He had a real gift for extracting the spirit of fun from the commonplace. One instance must suffice, the description of a Scottish dance: —

"They kickit and jumpit with mettle extraordinary; and whiskit and friskit and toed it and go'd it and twirl'd it and whirl'd it and stamp'd it and sweated it, tattooing the floor like mad. The difference between our country dance and these Scottish figures is about the same as leisurely stirring a cup of tea and beating up a batter pudding."

Naturally, with a poet's unstable imagination, he often had fits of the blues. He got rid of them, sometimes, in a unique fashion. He took a bath,

put on a clean shirt, brushed his clothes and hair, tied his shoestrings neatly; then, clean and refreshed, he sat down to write.

He once took a walk with Coleridge. The account of the monologue has not yet found its due place among the anecdotes of great men. "I walked with him at his alderman-after-dinner pace for nearly two miles, I suppose. In these two miles, he broached a thousand things — let me see if I can give you the list — Nightingales — Poetry — on Poetical Sensation — Metaphysics — Different genera and species of dreams — Nightmare — First and second consciousness — the difference explained between Will and Volition — Monsters — The Kraken — Mermaids — Southey believes in them — Southey's belief too much diluted — a Ghost story — Good-morning — I heard his voice as he came toward me — I heard it as he moved away — I had heard it all the interval. He was civil enough to ask me to call on him at Highgate." What a contrast this report is to Carlyle's in the "Life of Sterling," with its "unintelligible flood of utterance" like water pumped into a bucket. Carlyle was a genius impatient to talk himself. Keats was a genius content to listen.

No wonder, then, he was always welcome in

a company. He received and he gave. A genius with no affectations, no vanity. He had that magnanimity of spirit which is undisturbed by petty rivalries and jealousies. He held his friends by assuming their good will and by ignoring those slights and meaningless offenses which set Hunt, Haydon and Reynolds a-jangling. His moods, to be sure, were fitful. He was talkative, brilliant, when the talk was to his liking; when it was not, he sat silent. In the intimate circle the window seat was reserved for Keats. There we may best fix a picture of him in the characteristic attitude of one foot on the other knee and the hand clasping the instep. The sitting posture obscures the fact that he was only five feet high. Broad shoulders, depth of chest suggest the stature of a larger man. The profile invites affection; brown curling hair; forehead receding; nose slightly tilted; a finely rounded chin; an upper lip rather thick, as if stung by a bee and in need of some gentle unguent. The full face, as he turns to speak, shows the distinction and the consciousness of the high calling. The hazel eyes glow with some inward light as his words issue in a low musical voice. There is self-assurance in his modesty; at times he is petulant, fiercely assertive.

WELL WALK

Where Keats first met Coleridge

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The tradition has been perpetuated by several English writers that Keats had a taint of offensive Cockney manners. Mr. William Watson — who takes virtue unto himself for not reading the Brawne letters — says that the other letters are "near Cockney vulgarity always." And he smartly summarizes his opinions in this epigram: "It is Apollo with an unmistakable dash of 'Arry."

The survival of this tradition is no doubt due to the aristocratic contempt of humble birth and to the English lust for class distinctions. But to some of us on the other side of the Atlantic this insistence on Keats' Cockneyism seems like the self-infatuation of a Malvolio. The original meaning of Cockney is "an effeminate spoilt child." It is inoffensively applied also, we understand, to one who has always lived within the sound of Bow-bells. The "Blackwood's" reviewer, who foamed with rage because Hunt once addressed a nobleman as "My dear Byron," used this word as a synonym of underbred familiarity. These later critics of Keats, if they do not use it in this sense strictly, certainly imply the stigma of inferior class and manners. Three thousand miles from London, with only the printed letters and the testimony of his friends,

this last application of Cockney to Keats is quite incomprehensible. For the sake of unprejudiced truth, will some one of these superior critics present the specific cases which support the statement that Keats had the taint of the Cockney and that his letters are "near Cockney vulgarity always"? We will accept any definition of a gentleman that does not deny the right of a man to stand on his own feet, to speak according to the weight of his wisdom and to act by the rule which harmonizes self-respect with courtesy. If, perchance, some lapses of gentility be discovered in these letters of Keats, for every instance — unless it be argued that a king can do no wrong — we offer to furnish two such lapses from the letters of Lord Byron.

We suspect that the original shadow of slander has never been wholly lifted from Keats in his own country. Yet what does it matter! He has gone where he is no longer troubled by social discriminations. Contemporary England was stone-blind to his gifts. The few loyal friends who loved him as "Junkets" only faintly foresaw his fame. And those who now see cannot mar it with their epigrams about 'Arry. Nevertheless those who would know the man truly must detach him from this artificial English

environment and follow him to that dignified isolation into which he retired.

"I value more the privilege of seeing great things in loneliness than the fame of a great prophet."

XVIII

POETICAL NATURE

THE soul is a world in itself and has enough to do in its own home. Those whom I know already and who are grown as it were a part of myself, I could not do without: but for the rest of mankind, they are as much a dream to me as Milton's hierarchies."

It was in this conscious detachment from the public, whose applause he once craved, that Keats did his truly great work. He ceased to court fame. He cared more for perfect self-realization. His boon companion was the ideal of his art.

This ideal has been a germinal force in modern poetry — profoundly operative. Wordsworth brought calm and nature's healing power. Byron supplied a kind of riotous cosmic energy for battle. Shelley's lyrical cry inspired hope for the future. They were embroiled with their own times, face to face. Keats differs from all three.

He attempts to conquer happiness by an evasion of the enemy. He ignores the existence of modern problems. For the jangle, for overwrought nerves, for the sophistries of ephemeral wisdom, he offers the free play of the human faculties in the eternal calm of an illusion which is essential truth. And he finds joy, sufficient unto the day, in beauty.

This is what the Renaissance did for stunted mediæval Christianity. It said to the monks who debased the flesh, to the schoolmen who wrangled over their spider-spun theologies: "Forsake your cells! Forget your morbid superstitious fears! Wash your bodies! Eat the rich fruits of the earth! Make life large! Compel it to be joyful!" The Renaissance gave to the world an epoch of beneficence. Shakespeare and the Elizabethans were the children of its spirit in England. It was extinguished gradually by natural decadence, by the Puritan reaction toward asceticism, by the age of reason and commercialism. The nineteenth century opened in England with a new humanism. Wordsworth, Byron and Shelley were the chief poets of the social phase, with the local color of their day. Keats was the detached æsthete. He restored the pure spirit of the Renaissance.

He is therefore a very definite individuality and his poetical nature has characteristic traits.

The fundamental one is his receptivity to all good things. He is no doctrinaire, no "egotistical sublime." He does not see life through distorting glasses, nor does he force facts to accord with his predilections. He has preferences but not tyrannical prejudices. A poet of his type, Keats declares, has no real identity. He is passive; in a sustained mood of welcome to every impression. An Iago gives him as much pleasure as an Imogen. The moral propaganda is not a part of his business. His sole duty, as an artist, is to take the impression and transmute it by imagination into beauty.

The second trait is the insistence on the normal. In their desire to escape the commonplace and the conventional, many of the so-called Romantic poets were drawn toward the strange, the weird, the horrible. Of this strain of Romanticism Coleridge was the master; Southey a conjurer of bugaboos. In "Sleep and Poetry" Keats made his protest. Later he phrased it in one of his axioms, "I think poetry should surprise by a fine excess and not by *singularity*." Here is a definite rejection of the abnormal. His poetry does not attempt to strike attention by any ap-

peal to morbid curiosity. "Surprise" — the interest of novelty — comes from richness of detail within the limits of the normal. Keats is thus seen as a Romantic who restricted himself to the legitimate in myth, nature and man.

The third trait is fullness of description. This is the "fine excess" of dubious value. It is in opposition to the virtue of suggestiveness, so prominent in the canons of art to-day. Keats maintains that "the touches of beauty should never be half-way." The reader should not be left breathless, but content. Here is a source of weakness. The greatest poetry should leave us breathless, not content. When it contents, it loses its power (like satiety in love). Poe's theory, that poetry should be vague, is more effective than Keats' on this point.

> The glory that was Greece
> And the grandeur that was Rome

strikes a note of greater power than any of the passages in which Keats practices his precept of fullness of description. He outgrew it, in fact, as his work passed from the luxuriousness of "Endymion" toward austerity in "Hyperion" and the great odes.

The fourth trait, in Keats' own phrase, is "Negative Capability; that is when a man is

capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries and doubts without any irritable reaching after fact and reason." He had a dislike for the pursuit of truth by logic. He had a feeling that reason and imagination were antagonistic. The intellectual pursuit of truth quenched its emotional value. Therefore he preferred to remain in a certain degree of obscurity. "O, fret not after knowledge," he wrote at a time when his cry was for "a life of sensations rather than thoughts." Herein, too, he saw the mistake. After the clearing up with "Endymion" the cry became "Get learning — get understanding — I find earlier days are gone by — I find I can have no enjoyment in the world but a continual drinking of knowledge." A life of sensations without knowledge, he perceived, subjects one to the tyrannical reactions of the emotions. In knowledge the life of sensations finds a helpful relief from the fever and the chill of the feelings. It eases "the burden of the mystery." With the addition of an intellectual element in his art Keats set himself free from the mawkishness so well described in the preface to "Endymion." Reason became a beneficent check on the imagination. This change of position, however, does not nullify the principle of "Negative Capability," of resting

in uncertainties, mysteries, and doubts. It only restricts the application to proper use. Reason coöperates with the imagination, though as a subordinate faculty, conferring a half-tone instead of a full glare of light.

The poetical nature of Keats thus comprehends open receptivity, insistence on the normal, a growth from fullness of description to austerity, negative capability, or the suppression of a too zealous curiosity. To these may be added the obvious fact that he is the pure artist. He achieves his effects neither by dramatic incident nor by characters, — solely by the power of beauty.

The charge has been made that his poetry fails to strike the human chords. "The tragedy of 'Isabella' never really comes to us," says Mr. John M. Robertson. "Even 'Hyperion' misses the intense Dantean vibration of inward life." If so, this means that the re-creator of the spirit of the Renaissance is not really a humanist. In one sense the charge is true, in another it is false. The contradiction brings into clear relief the very loftiest element in Keats' genius. He does not dwell in this world of the flesh and of mortal ills. He has taken the sorrows of earth and lifted them up into the calm of eternal beauty. Up there our mortal pains have lost the power to

afflict us; our woes can no longer overwhelm our hearts. Tragedy itself, in this exalted sphere, becomes remote, sublime, like Cordelia in death. He who has done this has translated humanity to the realm of the archetypes and has created literature of the ultimate quality. Bacon has defined it. "Literature has something divine in it, because it raises the mind and *hurries it into sublimity* by conforming *the show of things* to the *soul*, instead of subjecting the soul to eternal things, as reason and history do."

XIX

STYLE

THE style of Keats was also a germinal force in modern poetry. Mr. Gosse asserts that it was not original, — he maintains that it was growing to be "a crystallization of all the best elements of the poetry of the ages into one perfect style." There are in Keats the echoes of Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, Dante and others. If originality be the repetition of a type with a difference, and the difference, in this case, be nigh unto perfection, we should take Mr. Gosse's statement as testimony of great originality in the style of Keats. Original or not, it was certainly unique among his contemporaries.

In the immature state it was little short of chaos. Gifford described it as consisting of "the most incongruous ideas in the most uncouth language." In our day Mr. Swinburne — a howling dervish among critics (yet a critic) — has

condemned the early work as "the most vulgar and fulsome doggerel ever whimpered by a vapid and effeminate rhymester in the sickly stage of whelphood." It is a far cry from this first sad phase (if it really was so sad) to the last, where Keats attained that sovereign mastery of language which is Shakespearean.

He practiced magic with words. This is the chief virtue of his style. In this respect he was the precursor of Tennyson. For Tennyson is less seer than magician of language.

Distinguish between magic and emotional enthusiasm. Look at Keats in his environment. See the lack of stimulus for his peculiar kind of magic.

Scott's poetry had swiftness and vigor, Byron's style had blood, bone, sinew. Shelley had his own power of incantation, but Keats did not feel it. Wordsworth, of the poets then living, bore the heaviest influence upon him. Yet he did not affect his form. For Wordsworth, with his theory of bald poetic diction, was more concerned with the power of substance than language. Take one of his best poems, "The Solitary Reaper," and observe the source of its appeal. After the picture of the girl, singing at her work, it concludes: —

I listened till I had my fill;
And when I mounted up the hill,
The music in my heart I bore
Long after it was heard no more.

The passage is poetic, beautiful. Yet no one word, taken by itself or as a part of a phrase, has any individual imaginative force. The diction is as commonplace as "house" or "field." The power is in the mind's image of the whole. Take another instance, from Coleridge, whose magic is often close to Keats', one of the most effective pictures in the "Ancient Mariner": —

The body of my brother's son
Stood by me knee to knee.
The body and I pulled at one rope;
But he said naught to me.

Here, too, the power is in the image, not the language. There is no phrase which gives to the chords of feeling a vibrant touch like Poe's "Nevermore" or Keats' "forlorn," "watcher of the skies," "alien corn." The style of the Lake poets is simple and grand. It does not possess, prevailingly, the magic which sends electric vitality into the words as words. Keats had a unique artistic conscience; his impulse was to crowd the line; "to load every rift with ore." Tennyson had the same instinct; he followed Keats and led the Victorian school.

> And, sitting *muffled* in *dark* leaves, you hear
> The *windy clanging* of the *minster* clock;
> Although between it and the garden lies
> A *league* of grass, *washed* by a slow broad stream,
> That, *stirred* with *languid pulses* of the oar,
> *Waves* all its *lazy* lilies and *creeps* on,
> *Barge-laden*, to three arches of a bridge
> *Crowned* with the *minster-towers*.

This crowded style, indeed, becomes obtrusive; an artificial mannerism. It has infected modern prose. In the prose of Mr. Henry James and Mr. Maurice Hewlett the virtue has been subtilized well-nigh into caricature.

Keats developed it in practical isolation. Shakespeare, of course, was his chief master in this magic of words. A comparison of Shakespeare's environment with Keats' will emphasize the latter's difficulty in bringing it into perfection. When Shakespeare wrote a score of competitive dramatists were around him. Fine phrases budded in the Elizabethan atmosphere like flowers in the open fields. They came as impetuously to the lips as American slang does to-day. Amid this immense fertility of phrase, Shakespeare found language without much effort. He could almost extemporize. Keats had to search. There were no Marlowes, Ben Jonsons, Beaumonts and Fletchers to give him compe-

tition and stimulus. His magic is therefore self-conscious. At times he attained the quality of Shakespeare. He did not have his copiousness and range.

The fault of his early style was a kind of euphuism. Shakespeare purged himself of that. So did Keats. In his great work he acquired power and poise. "Isabella" marks the point when he ceased to abuse the privileges of the crowded line. He advanced intellectually in the weight and dignity of substance. He progressed toward perfection of form.

With some definite conception of his poetic nature and the characteristic of his style, we may now examine separately the poems of the last fertile year of his creative work. The period is so short, the poems were conceived, drafted and revised at such interpenetrating times, that there is no advantage in a strict chronological order, even if this were possible. Like all human things they are the imperfect expressions of the reach that exceeds the grasp.

XX

LAMIA

KEATS, we are wont to say, expressed the simplicity of Greek life in an ornate style. His art is therefore hybrid. The opposition may be satisfied by regarding him as a belated poet of the Renaissance. The Greek ideal had the wisdom of philosophy for the soul, the free natural play of the senses for the body, a code of ethics epitomized in temperance. The Renaissance gave to starved ecclesiastical Europe the lightness, the joyousness of ancient Greece, while it retained some of the mediæval forms. At the time when the scholars of Italy were absorbing Greek culture and the Christian and pagan forces were finding in Raphael the poise of a perfect humanism, "Lamia" might have been read in the court of the Medicis by some poet of the day as a revived pagan romance. The tale is actually told by the Greek Philostratus. Keats has retold it, with fine local color, in the rich style of the Renaissance.

"Lamia" has directness of narrative. The incidents are clearly defined. The movement, though slow and graceful, has moments of outbreaking energy. It ends in almost spectacular climax. Keats has fused details into concentrated impressions. The quest of Hermes, at the beginning, translates the reader to the days when myth was ever present in the Greek consciousness. The release of Lamia from the serpent spell is a gorgeous festival of colors. The wooing of Lycius in the valley displays the wiles of a woman in subtle action. The magic palace of delight has the fascination of a perfect elysium of love. With the wedding feast the poet surpasses all his other pictures of epicurean magnificence. Finally the psychologic duel between the philosopher and the serpent-lady, — amid the music, the hush, the sense of some dreadful presence, — this duel, with the contemptuous cry of "Fool!" resolves the action into sudden dramatic catastrophe. Keats felt that at last he had produced a poem of force. "I am certain," he said, "there is that sort of fire in it that must take hold of people some way."

The theme is the opposition of wisdom and witchery. In the haunting suggestiveness of mystery Keats cannot compete with Coleridge. It

was not his forte. He does not dwell upon the weird in obscurity.[1] Lamia inspires none of the uncanny fear so powerfully divined in Lady Geraldine.

> Behold! her bosom and half her side—
> A sight to dream of, not to tell!
> O shield her! Shield sweet Christabel!

The element of witchery may add something of sensational effect in "Lamia"; the real poetic value lies almost wholly in the pictorial art which visualizes the delights of lovers in Greece.

The poem is one of Keats' triumphs in æsthetic realism. There is fine contrast between the sacred woodland and the purple-hung palace of marble; between Hermes, "pensive and full of painful jealousies," and the mortal lover, bending over his lady's eyes, "mirror'd small in paradise." The nymph of the god dwells among springs and coverts of flowers. The lady of Lycius leads him into a court of luxury. There are silken couches, palms, odorous censers, rows of lamps. The guests are washed with sponges, anointed with fragrant oils. There is revelry of wine, music, and fluent Greek; while around this isolated enjoyment moves the pedestrian

[1] An exception must be made of *La Belle Dame sans Merci*, which is unique among his poems.

populace of Corinth, with its white pavements, markets and lewd temples. The quality of amorousness is lower here than is usual with Keats. He has made no interfusion of the ethereal and the earthly. He has brought the interest down to the dead level of the senses.

> Let the mad poets say whate'er they please
> Of sweets of Faeries, Peris, Goddesses,
> There is not such a treat among them all,
> Haunters of cavern, lake and waterfall,
> As a real woman, lineal indeed
> From Pyrrha's pebbles or old Adam's seed.

Seekers after parallel passages may like to compare this with the lines in Byron's "Don Juan," published while Keats was writing:—

> I've seen much finer women, ripe and real,
> Than all their nonsense of the stone ideal.

Love, in "Lamia," is more complex than in "Isabella." Virgin innocence gives place to artifice and sex distinctions. In the matter of characteristic feeling, Isabella might have been Lorenzo, or *vice versa*. "Lamia" deals with the masculine and the feminine in human nature. Outwardly the lady is a *virgin purest-lipped*. But inwardly her being is dyed in *the red heart's core*. She is a *graduate* in the lore of love; she can practice the art of disentangling bliss from pain.

At first, on meeting Lycius, she assumes the goddess, coyly demanding inducements. When he recovers from her enchantment, she sings a Circean song to retain her power. Then she reveals herself as a mortal woman and fabricates a past of content in vestal seclusion. Her motive is purely selfish. Later, when Lycius dominates her in the palace of delight, his ardor becomes selfish, tyrannous. He is *luxurious in her sorrows*. In turn she displays the feminine trait of a woman subdued, by her relish of the masculine tyranny. The charge so often made that Keats' lovers are insipid is certainly unwarrantable for this pair.

Much has been made of the conflict between philosophy and the illusions of the imagination. The passage about Newton and the destruction of the glory of the rainbow has been cited as evidence of Keats' definitive scorn of science. If that scorn were all-inclusive, it would be a sign of intellectual deficiency. If, however, it was only a deprecation of the undue invasion of poetry by science, such as Wordsworth uttered about the man who would peep and botanize upon his mother's grave, then it is no more than a reassertion of Keats' principle of "Negative Capability," of "resting in uncertainties, mys-

teries and doubts." This is a privilege of the poet; one which is sometimes menaced by an aggressive scornful science. Too much intellectualism often suffocates the poet in Browning. If poetry be divine illusion, the poet must take an attitude like that of the scholastic theologians who affirmed that a thing might be false in philosophy yet true in religion.

"Lamia" is not to be regarded as any profound criticism of life. There was no issue of domestic morals. If there had been, the guardian Apollonius would scarcely have frustrated a marriage. The philosopher cared nothing about the ethics of the sexual relations; he was concerned about the general welfare of his ward. The tale is frankly pagan; therein lies part of its local color. Lycius wants to marry Lamia, but not for propriety's sake. He desires to exhibit such a beautiful bride to his townsfolk and make them envious. The motive is vanity.

The poem is the product of art almost mature. Even so sensitive a man as Mr. Swinburne would expunge only a few lines. Seed-pecking criticism has discovered a number of flaws in diction, rhyme and metre. The positive merits make such trivial objections seem ungracious. Nothing in this world is perfect. Ariel's song in

"The Tempest," under the microscope, shows an undeniable blemish.

"Lamia" is a fine poem. Nevertheless it does not exhibit Keats at his best. It is inferior in tone to "The Eve of St. Agnes," the odes and "Hyperion." It has magnificence but not grandeur. It is the story of a Tannhäuser in the Venusberg without the spiritual triumph. "Lamia" is neither gross nor passionate, yet it clings to the ground. The greatest poetry must lift. This poem is only a well-nigh perfect picture of the blandishments of sensuous love; and as such — Mr. Swinburne's enthusiasm suggests the thought — it might be regarded as leading on to the flaunting passion of "Laus Veneris."

XXI

THE EVE OF ST. AGNES

"Lamia" has the characteristics of the Renaissance. "The Eve of St. Agnes" has no Greek elements. There is not even a classical allusion in the poem. The details are all drawn strictly from the Middle Ages. The scene is a buttressed castle with guards at the gate; with chapel, tombs, effigies; with great banquet hall, stained-glass windows, columns groined and sculptured into the traceries of Gothic architecture. The religion is that of Catholic Europe. The men belong to chivalry; cavaliers wearing plumes and bearing lances. Vintners, hurrying through the doors, carry flagons to the revelers. The minor properties are all such as one finds in a museum of mediæval antiquities,—trumpets, lutes, gold salvers, cloths of gold and crimson, embroidery frames, chain lamps, canopy beds. Even for the carpets, supposed to be an anachronism, there is ample warrant.[1] The

[1] Schultz, *Das höfische Leben*, i, p. 78.

local color, by chance or careful study, is perfect.

"Isabella" was placed in Florence; "Lamia" in Corinth; "The Eve of St. Agnes" seems to have no particular locality. A comparison of the names in the various revisions, however, will show that Keats drifted from a cosmopolitan confusion into some consistency. The names finally chosen, together with internal evidence, enable us to fix the castle in place and the action in time. At least all the facts may be given a harmonious historical setting.

Porphyro — in one version Signor Porphyro — is manifestly Italian. Madeline might be English. But Keats deliberately eliminated two names that are distinctively English, Lacey and Dartmoor. There is feud between the families of Porphyro and Madeline. Two of her kinsmen are mentioned, Maurice and Hildebrand. Maurice had been given a Gothic coloring and an Alpine habitation by Byron in "Manfred" in 1817; whence Keats may (or may not) have derived it. Hildebrand is full-blooded Germanic. Keats finally selected these two names after rejecting Francesco Mendez and Ferdinand. The change is significant. It draws a line between Porphyro the Italian and the northern Germanic

family of Madeline. Internal evidence supports this distinction. The clan of Madeline's house drink Rhenish and mead; certainly proof of Germanic tastes. Furthermore, in contrast to Porphyro's race, they are spoken of as "a barbarian horde," a phrase which the Latins habitually apply to their northern neighbors. The time is before the Renaissance. There is bitter feud between the Italian and the Germanic families. The conditions are satisfied philologically and historically by an identification of this feud with the war of the Guelphs and the Ghibellines, the adherents of the Pope and the Emperor. Porphyro, whose home is in "the southern moors," would then belong to the papal faction and Madeline's relatives would be attached to the party of the German emperor, and their castle might be somewhere along the confines of Germany and Italy,—say the foothills of the Alps. The affection of old Angela is thus given a natural motive. She is an Italian of papal sympathy in the service of the hostile family. The weak link in the argument is the English name Madeline. This, to be sure, is so close to Madeleine that it might be a French name given to a German maiden. But let us not force Keats too far into philology. The argument is not altogether conclusive that he had this situa-

tion so precisely in mind. Yet further credibility is given to it by the fact that when he wrote he was fairly fresh from Cary's Dante. It was his pocket companion during the Scotch tour; and in the preface there is some detailed account of the wars of the Guelphs and the Ghibellines. There is a strong probability, then, based on the change of names and the internal evidence, that Keats, beginning with a vague notion, ultimately may have thought of the castle as lying south of the Alps and of the feud as due to this historic struggle.

And now for "the feast of cates" — that feast of offense to some critics. It has been hitherto regarded as an intrusive incident, lugged in by Keats to indulge his taste for effeminate luxuries. Bridges objects to it. Rossetti writes, "Why he did this, no critic and no admirer has yet been able to divine." The answer comes not from divination but from evidence. The feast was an essential element in some forms of the legend. This is actually suggested in the twentieth stanza. Angela has told Porphyro of Madeline's purpose. After he has won her consent to play his stratagem, she agrees to assist him and says: —

> All cates and dainties shall be stored there
> Quickly on this feast-night: by the tambour frame
> Her own lute thou wilt see.

She makes him wait while she hobbles off on this "catering" preparation. A preceding stanza, giving the legend, states that if Madeline fasted and went to bed, she would not only have "visions of delight" but would also receive "soft adorings" from her lover. The adorings Keats conceived as including the lute-playing and the feasting. The issue is, however, was he herein justified by any external authority? The popular form of the legend, derived from Ben Jonson and Burton, has fasting and only the vision of the lover in a dream. There are many other forms. One of these introduces "the dumb cake." [1] A similar form, for Midsummer Eve, has a cold collation of bread and cheese.[2] Another may be more elaborate: "On the Eve of St. Agnes various rites are practiced to obtain a glimpse of the spirit of the husband or to insure a dream in which he must show himself. With this object dumb cake may be prepared and eaten; *a supper may be set out* to lure the man's spirit." [3] The source of Keats' knowledge of the legend we shall probably never know. Nevertheless the evidence of the external warrant for

[1] Henderson, *Folk-Lore of the Northern Counties of England.*
[2] Thistleton Dyer, *English Folk-Lore.*
[3] Peacock, "The Folk-Lore of Lincolnshire," *Folk-Lore*, No. 48.

the feast element in the traditions of St. Agnes' Eve should cause his critics to write *nolle prosequi* across their objections.

Even if there were no such evidence, the poet would be artistically justified in inventing the element of the feast. It safeguards a very delicate situation. Keats, we have contended, is temperamentally prone to keep sensuousness toned up above sensuality. A lover in a lady's chamber at midnight stands perilously on the line between romance and gross realism. Nowhere else has Keats demonstrated more signally the purity of his mind. He portrays with fervor the dualism of human nature, yet always with a saving sense of the holiness of love's privilege. It is the atmosphere, charged with holiness, that keeps the imagination sweet and clean. Hence the insistence, at the beginning, on the wintry chill; it has artistic purpose. Hence the prominence of the ancient beadsman with his prayers, his religious awe; it has artistic purpose. Hence the use of sacred terms, as in "Isabella," to express love's passion,—*worship, eremite, angel, glory of a saint.* There is no gloating over flesh tints in the privacy of the maiden's room. Madeline's robe slips down; she stands intent upon her vigil, half hidden, like "a mermaid in seaweed." And

when Porphyro is at her bedside, he drops on his knees and thinks of the bed as a *shrine*.

These youthful lovers may be easily discriminated from those in "Lamia,"—those of artful wiles and tyrannous domination. They differ from the lovers in "Isabella." "Isabella" and "The Eve of St. Agnes" both deal indeed with the virgin innocence of courtship. But whereas Lorenzo has no force of character and drifts along on the current of fate, Porphyro has the daring resolution of Romeo. Angela demurs at his proposed stratagem; Porphyro threatens, if she does not consent, to declare himself to his foes and call down the feud. Like Romeo he has the audacity to steal his bride from the hostile house. Madeline, like Juliet, has the courage of love's impulse to forsake her family and flee. We have been told long enough that Keats' lovers are all the impotent victims of swoons and ecstasies. This is superficial criticism. "Isabella" may be a tale of helpless victims. "The Eve of St. Agnes" certainly has executive characters and dramatic action.

Analyze the narrative. "The extreme tenuity of this poem," writes Rossetti, "coupled with the rambling excursiveness of 'Endymion' and the futility of the 'Cap and Bells,' might be held

to indicate that Keats had very little head for framing a story — and, indeed, I infer that, if he possessed any faculty in this direction, it remained undeveloped up to the day of his death." We waive a debate about two of the poems mentioned, — the one an experiment in pure invention, the other a fragment done in broken health. We will apply the test to "The Eve of St. Agnes."

One test for good narrative is the possibility of transformation into dramatic form. This poem is so finely conceived that, with almost no rearrangement, it acts itself out in the imagination like an exquisite little one-act play on the stage. The structure is here; only more elaborate dialogue needs to be supplied.

We are in a theatre. The beadsman appears like the prologue, and as he passes across the stage, counting his rosary, the orchestra plays the gay measures of a dance. The prayer and the music serve as an overture for the main theme, love's passion as a blending of holiness and worldly pleasure. Then the curtain rises upon a maiden's chamber with mediæval furnishings. A canopy bed on the left; a closet on the right. At the rear a triple-arched window of stained glass through which comes the moonlight in

many colors. Subdued music from the hall of dancers below.

Old Angela enters, shaking with fear. She bears a tray of dainties and conceals it in the closet. She goes out and returns, leading Porphyro. He is aglow with sweet excitement. A dialogue follows about the legend of St. Agnes' Eve and Madeline's purpose. Porphyro proposes his ruse. The beldame, dreading evil consequences, falters, protests, relents, enjoins. The lover kneels and fervently abjures all *ruffian passion.* He secretes himself in the closet and Angela retires. Silence once more; silence, faint music, and the imagined swing of the dance. Then the door opens. Madeline enters, rapt, trembling, with candle in her hand. She tells her beads, rises without looking backward, begins to disrobe.

> Of all its wreathed pearls her hair she frees;
> Unclasps the warmed jewels one by one;
> Loosens her fragrant boddice.

The moonlight shines upon her, giving her head a halo; for St. Agnes has lent a miraculous lustre to the moon in honor of her votary. The candle is extinguished; the smoke rises like incense; the maid creeps into her virgin bed and soon lies —

> Blinded alike from sunshine and from rain,
> As though a rose should shut and be a bud again.

Silence again. Down below a door opens. The music breaks forth, "yearning like a god in pain" and is muffled as the door closes. Slowly the closet drapery is drawn aside. Porphyro moves stealthily across the floor —

> Noiseless as fear in a wide wilderness.

He spreads a crimson cloth on a table, sets out the golden dishes and the fruits. Then he approaches the bed, draws aside the curtain, beholds his beloved tenderly breathing —

> In blanched linen, smooth and lavender'd.

It is the spirit of reverence, mindful of his vow to Angela, that impels his first utterance:—

> And now, my love, my seraph fair, awake!
> Thou art my heaven and I thine eremite.

But the natural man, before that maiden helplessness, is shaken by the exquisite danger.

> Open thine eyes, for meek St. Agnes' sake,
> Or I shall drowse beside thee, so my soul doth ache.

Keats has given no subtler poise to a dramatic situation where the senses are in full cry and the spirit of chivalrous love restrains. Here passion contends with passion and the crisis turns. Porphyro seizes her lute and love's mortal desire melts into song.

> He ceased — she panted quick — and suddenly
> Her blue affrayed eyes wide open shone:
> Upon his knees he sank, pale as smooth-sculptured stone.

Madeline hovers between the world of dreams and the world of reality. While her judgment is beclouded, mistaking him for the illusions of sleep, unwittingly she utters the longing of her heart into the lover's ears.

> Oh leave me not in this eternal woe,
> For if thou diest, my love, I know not where to go.
>
> Beyond a mortal man impassion'd far
> At these voluptuous accents, he arose,
> Ethereal, flushed and like a throbbing star
> Seen 'mid the sapphire heaven's deep repose;
> Into her dream he melted, as the rose
> Blendeth its odour with the violet, —
> Solution sweet.

This is the moment of triumph. Romantic love has here found ultimate expression. But all that follows is dramatic, — dramatic in the swift action; in the intensity of joyous realities evolving themselves out of dreams; in the leaping of joy unto joy; in the flight of love into the refuge of the driving sleet and storm.

Criticism has not sufficiently perceived the sweeping undercurrent in Keats slowly infusing his genius with power in motion. Those moods of luxurious languor are borne along with this current. Criticism has contented itself too much with pointing out his "fine felicity of phrase" and with indicating his rapturous instants. The

truth is that he was growing into a grasp of larger things; passing from dainty trifles to those conceptions which, rising from the small, expand and lose themselves in the grand.

> And they are gone: aye, ages long ago,
> These lovers fled away into the storm.

It is a common tale, this story of Porphyro and Madeline. It has been sung in a hundred ballads. Keats has told it anew — with the richness of jeweled brocade, to be sure. Yet he has done more. For these lovers, sent out into the night, the sleet, the beating winds, — and lost there by a poet's forgetfulness of satiety and domestic ills, — hover forever in the imagination as the types of eternal happiness, just as Paolo and Francesca have become the types of eternal sorrow in the pitiless storms of hell.

XXII

THE ODES

THE narrative poems, naturally, have the prestige of general popularity. The odes have a greater significance to connoisseurs and readers of severe taste. We shall discuss five of these odes. In them, better than elsewhere, Keats reveals the clarifying depths of his mind. Love ceases to be an exclusive cult. He passes from that central bower of romance, by labyrinthine ways, into a profound intellectual life.

The "Ode to Psyche" might be regarded as a poem of transition. It is a palinode of the early enthusiasm for the moon. It is a deification of love as one of the minor graces. Passion is tempered into tenderness. The music here is a sustained *pianissimo*. Psyche, with Cupid, lies asleep, "'mid hushed, cool-rooted flowers." She has had no worship as a goddess; no grove, no altar, no oracular priest. The "happy pieties" of antiquity brought her no share of homage. Like

the prince who raised the neglected cinder maiden to royal honors, Keats creates a belated cult for this forgotten child of mythology. He becomes her priest, guarding "a rosy sanctuary" of the mind, with grove and temple and choir.

> And there shall be for thee all soft delight
> That shadowy thought can win;
> A bright torch and a casement ope at night
> To let the warm love in!

The ode "To Autumn" adds a figure to English folk-lore. Autumn, a rustic deity of husbandry, is seen as a toiler amid the mellow fruitfulness of grapes, apples and nuts. She haunts the granaries. She drowses in the half-reaped furrow. She watches beside a cider press "the last oozings hours by hours." Spring has its songs. Autumn has a music, too. And it is not mournful. The redbreast whistles. The full-grown lambs bleat from the hills. The lowering clouds transfuse the sunshine and "touch the stubble plains with rosy hue." Autumn is the goddess of rich fruition. Nature, in this ode, is painted in the purely objective manner. It smells of the soil. Imagination sheds no visionary light. The mood of the poet is relief and ease, full of the Chaucerian gladness of out-of-doors. "I never liked stubble fields so much as now — aye, better than the

chilly green of spring," wrote Keats just after the composition of the ode.

The world's great ode to Melancholy was etched by Albrecht Dürer on a copper plate. There one sees the tools and instruments which have given man dominion over worldly comfort and worldly knowledge. The star blazes, the rainbow glows, the magic crystal offers its illusions. And the majestic figure sits — staring with sad eyes into space — foiled. It is the ultimate symbolism of the futility of human intelligence. Keats' "Ode on Melancholy" is also a reading of fate. It is not so intellectually complex as Dürer's. It is almost wholly emotional. Yet an emotion, profoundly felt, reaches fundamental truth and becomes intellectual. The Greeks sometimes sculptured on tombstones the alto-relief of a lady about to die. The maid holds her casket of jewels, her lover clasps her hand, a friend stands beside. Her grief is the inevitable end of her joy. This is the truth which Keats has felt poignantly. He who would go in quest of Melancholy needs no wolf's-bane, no distemper, no abnormal stimulus. Melancholy dwells not in the realm of the morbid. Her shrine is in the very temple of delight, her reign is the recessional of natural joy. He only can enter her dark

holy of holies who has drained the cup of happiness from the full to the dregs. And then he must submit to the law of compensation; the payment of the price.

> She dwells with Beauty — Beauty that must die;
> And Joy, whose hand is ever at his lips
> Bidding adieu; and aching Pleasure nigh,
> Turning to poison while the bee-mouth sips:
> Ay, in the very temple of Delight
> Veil'd Melancholy has her sovran shrine,
> Though seen of none save him whose strenuous tongue
> Can burst Joy's grape against his palate fine;
> His soul shall taste the sadness of her might,
> And be among her cloudy trophies hung.

This is not the melancholy of the foiled intellect. It is not the despair of the diseased mind. It is the melancholy, inherent in mortal fate, of the fleeting emotion of delight.

It may be worth while to note that the theme of this ode is a replica of the ode to "Sorrow" in the fourth book of "Endymion." There Sorrow is pictured in the guise of health, full of lustrous passion and borrowing "Heart's lightness from the merriment of May." In both poems the symbolism expresses that richness of joy which only can give admittance to the palace of Melancholy. The strenuous tongue that bursts the grape against the palate is the "classical terseness" for the elaborate description of the revels of Bacchus.

A comparison of the stanza just quoted with one from the earlier ode will show how Keats' style gained (and lost) as it developed toward the austere.

I saw Osirian Egypt kneel adown
Before the vine-wreath crown!
I saw parched Abyssinia rouse and sing
To the silver cymbal's ring!
I saw the whelming vintage hotly pierce
Old Tartary the fierce!
The kings of Inde their jewel-sceptres vail,
And from their treasures scatter pearled hail;
Great Brahma from his mystic heaven groans,
And all his priesthood moans;
Before young Bacchus' eye-wink turning pale.

The "Ode to a Nightingale" is the richest of the five in obvious attractions. It gives unalloyed pleasure to all lovers of Keats except the minute philosophers. One of these picks it to pieces and finds it full of flaws. It is, he declares, inapt in phrase and illogical in thought. Now any two judges may disagree about the aptness of figurative language; the answer to the objection on this point is that the ode has furnished as many lines for pleasurable remembrance as the other four. But about the laws of thought there can be no real disagreement. If the "Ode to a Nightingale" is illogical, an analysis ought to expose that lack of logic. Here is the argument

by stanzas with a few words of interpretation.

1. It is night. The song of the nightingale has stirred the poet to a mood of rapture almost intoxicating. He is, for the moment, happy beyond man's common privilege.

2. He desires a continuance of this rapture and seeks to share the bird's exalted life. As a means he first thinks of wine. He chooses southern wine because it is lighter and has more of the inspiration of the fabled waters of Hippocrene than the harsh beverages of the north.

3. He admonishes the nightingale to escape wholly from this melancholy world, where joy is ephemeral and human fate is laden with misery.

4. He promises to follow the bird in flight. But on second thought he will not use wine as the means. He will fly on the invisible wings of poetry. Momentarily he is lifted by illusion.

5. As his poetic imagination becomes rapt with inward gazing, the physical world about him fades into obscurity. He has a vague sensation of being in "embalmed darkness."

6. Still hearing the bird's song, he muses on death. The present seems the richest moment for dying. There would be the music of the bird

and no pain. Even when he is in his grave, he reflects, the bird would still sing.

7. Then in his musing the bird's song becomes the symbol of the eternal note of joy in nature —the note that has cheered emperors and clowns, even the sad heart of Ruth.[1] It is contrasted with the transitory life of man and his magic fancies of romance, now forlorn.

8. The word "forlorn," its doleful sound and meaning, breaks the illusion of the imagination and summons him back, like a warning bell, to the normal state of man. Poetry cannot sustain this ethereal flight with the bird. He catches its faint strains, now remote. He is left alone, still in a daze, to suffer the disenchantment of the human world.

It may be superfluous to add that this ode is, in miniature, a spiritual biography of the poetic

[1] This is the chief crux in the logic. The bird, however, has lost its individual identity and has become the agent of utterance for eternal song in nature. No reasonable person would presume that Keats believed this nightingale had sung to Ruth. It is only a symbol. Shelley used this symbolism for the Skylark, the Cloud, the Sensitive Plant, the West Wind; each is made the embodiment of an eternal elemental spirit. The antiquity of this literary convention (which offends the logician) dates back as far as Moschus. "Verily thou all silent will be covered with earth, while it has pleased the nymphs that the frogs shall always sing." *Lament for Bion*, iii, 112, 113.

life. Its logic is defensible; its psychology is final. Keats here commands the title of "the poet's poet." It should be noted, nevertheless, that this poet cannot find in nature an *enduring* refuge.

In the "Ode on a Grecian Urn" we pass from nature to art. Here we get the deepest soundings in the poetic life of Keats. It is itself a thing of beauty; and in this well-nigh perfect gem he has crystallized his philosophy of idealism. The style has reached the all-comprehending reticence of the classic manner. The ode is thus the quintessential product of his maturity. He could not have done anything better if he had lived a hundred years.

There stands the urn; a bit of ancient pottery; a souvenir of sylvan love, of a sacrificial procession, of a town deserted for the woodland altar. But this urn, like the Shekinah in Solomon's temple, is the visible manifestation of a divine idea. A decorative trifle has become *the unravished bride of quietness, the foster-child of silence and slow time.* A concrete object of this earth has been lifted into the abstract, into the sublime.

Antiquity is dead. Ages have passed. Empires have come and gone. Yet this urn still survives as a symbol of something eternal. And how has this immortality been conferred? By art; by

art's power to transmute the physical forms of sense into the metaphysics of the mind. Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard are sweeter. The boughs that shed their leaves in ancient Greece have mouldered. The melodist that played his pipe and the lover that clasped his maid have gone the way to dusty death. The carven boughs of art still enjoy perpetual spring; the melodist plays on unwearied; the lover pants with keen desire forever, and his maiden is forever fair. The temporal has been embalmed by art into eternal archetypes. The life of the senses is mastered by the divine idea.

It is here that Keats abjures his loyalty to the senses. Realization is of the flesh; it brings satiety, disenchantment, death. Anticipation is the privilege of the spirit, breathing the idealism of the sweet to-be. Arrested anticipation is immortal life in the ideal. Art makes this arrest in beauty; and when man has fixed his soul in it, he has attained all essential truth.

> "Beauty is truth, truth beauty," — that is all
> Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

His curiosity about the mysteries that plague the human mind stops here. For him this is enough to live by, to die by and to assure salvation. The

idealism of beauty as final truth, — this is his *enduring* refuge.

From these five odes, as fragments of himself, we can construct the full stature of the intellectual man. In the early years he did live disproportionately in the senses. Romantic love was an absorbing motive. The "Ode to Psyche" shows this love yielding precedence to other themes. From the ode "To Autumn" may be reasonably inferred his continuing joy in out-of-doors. It is in the "Ode on Melancholy" that we find him striking deep into pessimism. It may be a platitude that he who enjoys most keenly must suffer most poignantly; but Keats feels this with such intensity that it ceases to be a platitude. He discovers, moreover, that melancholy is not morbid; it is normal, — an inevitable element in mortal fate. In the "Ode to a Nightingale" he finds an escape from pessimism in nature. Yet nature, whatever her strength of appeal, can bring to him only a temporary relief. Nature may have her eternal note of comfort. Keats can seize it; he cannot hold it. Wordsworth seized and held in his consciousness —

> an ever-enduring power
> And central peace, subsisting at the heart
> Of endless agitation.

Keats found in nature only intense transitory pleasure. He had for her no transcendental vision. But he did have this vision for art. In art as symbolized by the urn he found a permanent refuge from pessimism. There he was secure from Melancholy — who dwells with "Beauty that must die" — the beauty of form and substance. In the idealism of art he attained fixity of faith in transcendental beauty and truth and rested content. For these divine ideas, illusive, metaphysical, like the necessary vagueness of our notion of God, can never become earthly idols or be destroyed by realization. Art, therefore, is akin to religion.

So Keats stands, in his full stature, as the pure artist, with a triumphant pagan faith.

XXIII

THE PRINCIPLE OF BEAUTY

It was "Hyperion" that turned the tide of Keats' reputation toward fame. Note its effect on three men. Shelley, previously tepid, was stirred by it to an enthusiasm that gave sincerity to his "Adonais." Byron, disgusted at the early work, had cried, "No more of Keats, I entreat. Flay him alive." Later he wrote, "The fragment of 'Hyperion' seems actually inspired by the Titans and is as sublime as Æschylus." De Quincey's censure of "Endymion" was as severe as the "Quarterly's." He called "Hyperion" "the greatest of poetical torsos" and added that it had the simplicity, the austere beauty, the majesty of Greek temples. Posterity agrees with these judgments.

Why did "Hyperion" conquer the prejudice and compel this admiration? A clear answer requires some preliminary study of Keats' conception of beauty.

He lived like a hermit in seclusion. In "The Palace of Art" Tennyson portrays the experience of a soul isolated among æsthetic pleasures. It is lord over nature, lord of the visible earth, lord of the five senses. The end of that exclusive devotion to art is nausea. Keats' artistic life is a parallel with a different conclusion. His isolation produced no nausea; it produced great poetry and a passion for length of days. And the reason is that he preserved the freshness of creative desire.

"I am certain of nothing but the holiness of the Heart's affections and the truth of the Imagination," he wrote in the first flush of his career. He continued in that enthusiasm. The lustre of his imagination shed over reality the glamour of beauty. Wordsworth's Immortality ode was at once a source of inspiration and dread. The elder poet lost *the visionary gleam* with his youth and turned to the consolations of the *primal sympathies* and the *philosophic mind*. Keats had no primal sympathies for Matthews and Leech-gatherers, and he fought off the philosophic mind like a disenchantment. He wanted to perpetuate *the glory and the freshness of the dream*, in which the imagination remains *the eye among the blind* and the earth seems *appareled*

in celestial light. And he did it; he preserved his youth. Aubrey De Vere remarks that for Keats there is a peculiar aptness in the phrase "a child of song."

This imagination, as we have already shown, he used in the conciliation of the sensuous and the ideal. "Men," says Ruskin, "having naturally acute perceptions of the beautiful, yet not receiving it with a pure heart, nor into their hearts at all, never comprehend it, nor receive good from it, but make it a mere minister to their desires, an accompaniment and seasoning of lower animal pleasures, until all their emotions take the same earthly stamp and *the sense of beauty sinks into the servant of lust.*" It is Keats, with his holiness of the heart's affections and his imagination conceiving beauty as truth, who has shown the better way. Epicureanism and Platonism are commonly regarded as antipathies. The pillar saints, like St. Simeon Stylites, maintained an absolute divorce between the senses and the spirit. Keats, anticipating Browning's "Rabbi Ben Ezra," reached a healthy humanism in which the flesh helps the soul and the soul helps the flesh. And this doctrine in his poetry makes his art fulfill its divine mission.

Schiller has a fine passage bearing upon this

point in his essay on "The Use of the Chorus in Tragedy." "True art has for its object not merely to afford transient pleasure, to excite a momentary dream of liberty. Her aim is to make us intrinsically and absolutely free. And this she accomplishes by awakening, exercising and perfecting in us *a power to remove to an objective distance the world of the senses*, — which otherwise only burdens us as dead weight, as blind force, — to transform it into the free working of our spirit and thus *to master matter by means of the idea.*" This is the exact philosophy of the "Ode on a Grecian Urn," Keats' quintessential poem. He passes with his Epicureanism into Platonism. He uses the one in the higher service of the other. In his palace of art such a use of æsthetic pleasure brings liberty to the soul, not nausea.

It is a tradition of criticism that Keats maintains before beauty an attitude of contemplation. "It was with the languor of rest that he associated the idea of enjoyment," says Aubrey De Vere. This is substantially true of all the poems so far considered, especially of the characteristic odes "To a Nightingale" and "On a Grecian Urn." The artist's mood is repose. "It dwelt in him," says De Vere, "with a still intensity, a profound

passion." It should be distinguished from the *aequanimitas* of the Stoics. For Keats' repose is not calm resistance. It comprehends ease, receptivity, inaction.

The violation of this principle of repose, of brooding inaction, before beauty, gave to "Hyperion" a unique power. And it was this which caused the reversal of judgment on Keats.

XXIV

HYPERION

THE ambition of Keats was certainly audacious. "Hyperion" is almost a leap at the stars. Little is known of the war of the Titans and the Olympians; the incidents of the epic would have been largely the inventions of the poet's brain. From a few hints he had to re-create a mythology which the genius of a race had evolved through many generations. Keats dared again, as in "Endymion," the test of unaided originality. Shakespeare had his copious sources. Milton had Vondel, the scholarship of a life and the theology of a living church. Tennyson had the richest collection of romances in mediæval literature. Keats went back to prehistoric time with only a few patches of information. The first cause for wonder is that the conception of "Hyperion" is neither loose nor thin.

We shall presume that every reader is acquainted with its obvious merits: the line crowded

with imaginative values; the power of sustaining the level of the heights. There are no lapses into mere intellectualism. The poem is of imagination all compact. The auroral glow and the rumbling thunder of the passages make all appreciative comment seem feeble. Our purpose, in the following review, is to bring one feature into clear relief and to let the poem make its own direct appeal.

Saturn is dethroned, in exile. In a vale of primæval silence he sits, with closed eyes, listening for comfort from the ancient mother Earth. Thea draws near; the sorrow of impending doom is on her face, —

> As if calamity had but begun;
> As if the vanward clouds of evil days
> Had spent their malice and the sullen rear
> Was with its stored malice labouring up.

The rebel dynasty has invaded their serene domain, despoiling it like a barbaric horde. She has no consolation for the nerveless king. Her futile words end in regret for violating his slumbrous solitude; she bows her forehead to the ground.

> One moon, with alteration slow, had shed
> Her silver seasons four upon the night,
> And still these two were postured motionless,
> Like natural sculpture in cathedral cavern;

The frozen God still couchant on the earth,
And the sad Goddess weeping at his feet.

At last Saturn lifts his eyes and speaks. He is only a feebly animate body; the martial spirit forsook him on the way to exile.

"Search, Thea, search! and tell me if thou seest
A certain shape or shadow, making way
With wings or chariot fierce to repossess
A heaven he lost erewhile: it must — it must
Be of ripe progress — Saturn must be king.
There must be Gods thrown down and trumpets blown
Of triumph calm, and hymns of festival
Upon the gold clouds metropolitan,
Voices of soft proclaim, and silver stir
Of strings in hollow shells; and there shall be
Beautiful things made new, for the surprise
Of the sky-children."

The passion for reconquest brings him to his feet. With the confidence that, though his realm be lost, he can fashion another out of chaos, he departs with Thea to seek the remnant of his host.

Meanwhile Hyperion still rules his empire in the sun.

His palace bright,
Bastion'd with pyramids of glowing gold,
And touch'd with shade of bronzed obelisks,
Glar'd a blood red through all its thousand courts,
Arches and domes and fiery galleries;
And all its curtains of Aurorian clouds
Flushed angrily.

Hyperion's rule is already threatened. Omens of disaster have shaken his giant nerves, and his minions are clustered in fear like men expectant of the earthquake that will destroy their dwellings. In this dread Hyperion approaches his palace.

> He enter'd, but he entered full of wrath;
> His flaming robes streamed out beyond his heels,
> And gave a roar, as if of earthly fire,
> That scar'd away the meek ethereal Hours
> And made their dove-wings tremble. On he flared,
> From stately nave to nave, from vault to vault,
> Through bowers of fragrant and enwreathed light,
> And diamond-paved lustrous long arcades,
> Until he reached the great main cupola;
> There standing fierce beneath, he stampt his foot,
> And from the basements deep to the high towers
> Jarr'd his own golden region.

Phantoms of doom surround him and becloud his sight. But these only inspire him, in his strength, to scorn and warlike resolution.

> "The shady visions come to domineer,
> Insult and blind and stifle up my pomp.
> Fall! No, by Tellus and her briny robes!
> Over the fiery frontier of my realms
> I will advance a terrible right arm
> Shall scare that infant thunderer, rebel Jove,
> And bid old Saturn take his throne again."

He prepares for action. He clears away the invading vapors, veils the sun in a sable curtain of

clouds and waits for the dawn. Then Cœlus, father of the Titans, from the universal space of the stars, recounts to him the history of the Titan brood and commands him to descend to earth in aid of the vanquished Saturn.

> Ere half this region-whisper had come down,
> Hyperion arose, and on the stars
> Lifted his curved lids, and kept them wide
> Until it ceas'd; and still he kept them wide:
> And still they were the same bright, patient stars.
> Then with a slow incline of his broad breast,
> Like to a diver in the pearly seas,
> Forward he stoop'd over the airy shore,
> — And plung'd all noiseless into the deep night.

In the second book the Titan remnant is discovered in a cave. It is a den where crags thrust their jagged foreheads into crags, the waterfalls are thunderous and no insulting light can glimmer on their tears. Some of their comrades are in flight; others have been chained in torture by the victors —

> Dungeon'd in opaque element, to keep
> Their clenched teeth still clench'd, and all their limbs
> Lock'd up like veins of metal, crampt and screw'd.

Those assembled in the cave lie like a group of Druid stones upon some desolate moor, each one shrouded in his woe and oblivious of his neighbor. Creus is one.

His ponderous iron mace
Lay by him, and a shatter'd rib of rock
Told of his rage.

Enceladus is another.

He meditated, plotted, and even now
Was hurling mountains in that second war,
Not long delay'd, that scar'd the younger Gods
To hide themselves in form of beast and bird.

To this assemblage, disconsolate, without leadership, Saturn comes with his guide.

Above a sombre cliff
Their heads appear'd, and up their stature grew
Till on the level height their steps found ease:
Then Thea spread abroad her trembling arms
Upon the precincts of this nest of pain,
And sidelong fix'd her eye on Saturn's face.

The god, struggling with despair and self-command, passes into the midst of the fallen tribe. They break from their lethargy and do him reverence. Saturn confesses ignorance of the cause of his dethronement. He calls upon Oceanus for an explanation. Oceanus is the philosopher of the council. He relates the birth of light from chaos; of life from light; the genesis of the Titans from Heaven and Earth. Their downfall, he predicts, is irretrievable. He finds the reason in the evolutionary processes of natural law.

"We fall by course of Nature's law, not force
Of thunder or of Jove. Great Saturn, thou,
. . . . . .
Thou art not the beginning nor the end.
As Heaven and Earth are fairer, fairer far
Than Chaos and blank Darkness, though once chiefs;
And as we show beyond that Heaven and Earth
In form and shape compact and beautiful,
In will, in action free, companionships,
And thousand other signs of purer life;
So on our heels a fresh perfection treads,
A power more strong in beauty, born of us
And fated to excel us, as we pass
In glory that old Darkness —
For 't is the eternal law
That first in beauty should be first in might:
Yea, by that law, another race may drive
Our conquerors to mourn as we do now.
Receive the truth and let it be your balm."

Clymene, a youthful goddess, confirms his explanation by the description of a vision in which was revealed the character of the fated dispossessor of Hyperion. It came to her in strains of music from an island — a blissful golden melody: —

A voice came sweeter, sweeter than all tune,
And still it cry'd, "Apollo! young Apollo!
The morning-bright Apollo!"

A resignation to fate seems about to prevail. Enceladus, a god of brute force, however, is

aroused to anger and supreme contempt. He spurns such baby counsel, dares the bolts of Jove, and spreads a contagion of resistance. Here we find the dramatic impetus of the epic.

"What, have I rous'd
Your spleens with so few simple words as these?
O joy! for now I see you are not lost:
O joy! for now I see a thousand eyes
Wide glaring for revenge!" As this he said,
He lifted up his stature vast, and stood,
Still without intermission speaking thus:
"Now ye are flames, I'll tell you how to burn,
And purge the ether of our enemies;
How to feed fierce the crooked stings of fire,
And singe away the swollen clouds of Jove,
Stifling that puny essence in its tent.

. . . . . .

And be ye mindful that Hyperion,
Our brightest brother, still is undisgraced —
Hyperion, lo! his radiance is here!"

The god arrives from the sun to lead the Titans in the second war.

In pale and silver silence they remain'd,
Till suddenly a splendor, like the morn,
Pervaded all the beetling gloomy steeps,
All the sad spaces of oblivion,
And every gulf, and every chasm old,
And every height, and every sullen depth,
Voiceless, or hoarse with loud tormented streams:
And all the everlasting cataracts,
And all the headlong torrents far and near,

Mantled before in darkness and huge shade,
Now saw the light and made it terrible.
It was Hyperion: — a granite peak
His bright feet touch'd, and there he stay'd to view
The misery his brilliance had betrayed
To the most hateful seeing of itself.

The few lines in the third book give an account of Apollo's youth on the isle of Delos. He is seen wandering, in the morning twilight, weighed down by some mysterious burden. Mnemosyne has deserted the Titan cause and comes to worship this "loveliness new-born." Under her ministrations he is about to receive the apotheosis in divine wisdom. In the midst of this the fragment abruptly stops.

The critics are at odds about the probabilities of success, if the epic had been completed. Keats gave artificiality and Miltonic inversions as the reasons for discontinuance. In the light of posterity's judgment — Mr. Colvin calls it "one of the grandest poems in the language" — these reasons seem trivial and inadequate. Mr. Paul Elmer More has found the fatal defect in the conception. "Hyperion," he urges, was intended to be a pæan of new beauty; but in spite of the poet it became a dirge for the passing of the old. After describing Hyperion and his palace he could not make a greater impression with Apollo. This

criticism points out the inherent danger. Apollo, as conceived, could hardly carry out a sympathetic rôle as the protagonist of the victors. If Hyperion were to be an ill-fated Hector, his rival gave promise of being, not an Achilles, but a Paris. Our theory is that Keats began with an evolutionary idea of beauty as triumphant over crude force. When two books were finished, he found himself delivered of a poetic strength which he had not fully anticipated. The splendor of Hyperion made Apollo an impossible epic hero. Heroic valor, as the world still goes, is superior in appeal to grace, however beautiful. To force the superiority of the latter would be artificial, and Keats saw this. The issue has been demonstrated more than once. Satan is the real hero of "Paradise Lost." Klopstock's "Messias" is an epic failure. Dante's "Inferno" brands the imagination with power, while the "Paradise" leaves it in luminous haze. The epic demands dominating strength. Beauty triumphant is essentially lyrical.

This speculation about the artificiality inherent in the conception of "Hyperion" finds further warrant in the fact that in the recast, or "Vision," Keats rearranged the setting and the action; and the change weakened the dramatic impressive-

ness of the Titans. The "Vision" has been regarded as evidence of "a loss of artistic power and perception under physical decay and mental agony." But it is by no means certain that the second draft was made after the physical collapse. A more logical assumption, in view of the actual changes, is that the "Vision" is a clumsy attempt to avoid the inevitable anti-climax in the first design.

Now for the main feature. "Hyperion" first conquered respect and admiration for the ludicrous "Johnny Keats." And why? Because here, for the first time, Keats controls something new; something which always commands the attention of the Anglo-Saxon. Except in faint promise, nothing like it has been found in any of his previous poems. Matthew Arnold, in his comparison of the literary spirit of the English and the French, touched the truth when he said that the genius of the English lies chiefly in energy. "Genius is mainly an affair of energy, and poetry is mainly an affair of genius; therefore a nation whose spirit is characterized by energy may well be eminent in poetry." Ruskin has berated his countrymen because they have remained indifferent to the fine arts. Yet the nation that has shown neglect for sculpture and painting is pre-

eminent in poetry. Poetry, better than statuary or pictures, is the artistic form for the transmission of energy. The Anglo-Saxon is particularly receptive to the genius of energy. The poets who have been scant in energy have had to wait for recognition. Think of Wordsworth, waiting forty years; and Byron, awaking one morning and finding himself famous. Run down the long line from the unknown *scôp* of "Beowulf" to Kipling. Tennyson won the laureateship chiefly through "Ulysses." Read Taine in confirmation of Arnold.

The author of "Isabella," "Lamia," "The Eve of St. Agnes" and the odes would have been accepted, in time, as a great poet — great as an artist of beauty in repose. But his devotion to this type of beauty could not obtain immediate response from the English. In those days of masculine antipathies, men like Byron, Scott and Christopher North actually despised him. He seemed to lack masculine energy. The expression of his genius lagged behind the latent strength in his character. With "Hyperion" he lifted the beauty of repose into sublimity. But he did more. The "terrier courage" of his pugnacious character, as his genius developed, found an outlet at last in his art. There is in "Hype-

rion" a rousing masculinity. It vibrates with mass power in action. Keats' principle of beauty in repose has been liberated into the beauty of dynamic energies.

XXV

PHILOSOPHY OF HIS ART

AUTHORS read to us from the book of human nature. Each one beholds life as a play of interacting forces, and each emphasizes their relative values according to his character. The Germans have a word for this personal estimate for which there is no adequate equivalent in English, *Weltanschauung*. Shakespeare's seems all-inclusive. Goethe's shows a similar range. Both hold the contending forces in poise. Dante's also has a universal range, with an added intensity of love and hate. The men of minor genius absorb and utilize only special forces. Heine is of these, and Shelley and De Musset and Poe. However great Keats may be in *quality* as an artist — place him with Shakespeare if you choose — it is among these men of limited vision that he must find his intellectual station. His vista was widening, yet he never saw life large.

Indeed he absorbs and utilizes only one of the

motive forces. The others appear to lie dormant. He had opinions on many subjects; the letters reveal the alertness of his mind. But these opinions scarcely touch his poetry. His age was one of the great destructive-constructive epochs of history; it witnessed a bloody revolution, the spectacle of a world conqueror, shocks of battle, conventions of despots, partitions of nationalities, sacrifices of loyalty to king and to the cause of man. Amid all these the only motive that interested Keats vitally was the principle of beauty in all things. He passed through the clamor of the time, singing, like the lover in Horace, his Lalage, of beauty.

Beauty was his panacea for human ills. He shuddered at the fierce impulse of destruction in nature: the tyranny of the strong; the preying of the shark, the hawk, the robin upon the weaker animals; the struggle among men for survival.[1] Sheer strength, he declared in one of the earlier poems, was like a fallen angel. "Hyperion" was designed to show, in the evolution of culture, the downfall of sheer strength before the all-conquering power of beauty. The Olympians were to vanquish the Titans because it is the eternal law that "first in beauty should be first in might."

[1] *Epistle to John Hamilton Reynolds.*

This was his message. While Wordsworth was communing with pantheistic nature and Shelley was dreaming of perfectibility through reason and Byron was blindly inspiriting the rebels, Keats was proclaiming the regenerative influence in the worship of beauty.

Pursue his principle into its implications. Then we shall see that, if he did not read life large, he read deep.

The division of philosophy is triune. It comprehends the true, the beautiful, the good; the intellectual, the æsthetic, the moral. Keats identifies the true with the beautiful and discredits the importance of anything beyond these. The æsthetic thus absorbs the intellectual and annihilates the moral. The principle of beauty is thus, of necessity, left as the guardian and guide of conduct.

Keats, as a member of society, appears to have acquitted himself, on the whole, very worthily. Of course he was educated, more or less unconsciously, by the ethics of contemporary England. Yet we can find neither in the records of his life nor in his poetry any evidence that he consciously squared his standards of conduct with a moral code. Certainly in Keats, the poet, that which we call conscience is merged and lost in the in-

stinct for the beautiful. This instinct for him is the arbiter of conduct. "*I never can feel certain of any truth but from a clear perception of its Beauty,*" he wrote in a letter to his brother George.[1] And later: "Even here, though I myself am pursuing the same instinctive course as the veriest human animal you can think of, I am, however young, writing at random, straining at particles of light in the midst of a great darkness, without knowing the bearing of any one assertion, of any one opinion. *Yet may I not in this be free from sin?*" This, the record of a passing moment, is in line with the drift of his formal utterance. Truth he discerned and conduct he regulated through the instinct for beauty.

This exclusive worship of beauty may lead to divergent consequences. It may run down the scale into a creed of art for art's sake, and life for art's sake, until with degenerates, as Ruskin said, the sense for the beautiful may become the servant of lust. Or it may run up the scale, as it does with Keats, into a creed of art for life's sake and life for eternity's sake, until the human spirit attains the perfection of divine being.[2]

This thought lures us in speculation. For we

[1] Colvin's *Letters of Keats*, pp. 201, 202, 237.

[2] Cf. chap. xi, on "The Philosophy of Soul-Making."

conceive that a divine being, as he exists unto himself, is unvexed by a conscience. He is compelled to no scrutiny of right and wrong. His nature is complete, above temptation. His existence is one of unerring impulse, so wholly free that all distinctions of good and evil are obscured in the beauty of divine perfection. With him truth is absolute and conduct is the spontaneous expression of his nature; both are so harmoniously fixed in finality that his life is an eternal perception of the beautiful.

And is not this the ideal, at an infinite remove, toward which the human soul is rising? There is physical instinct in the brute and spiritual impulse in the divine being. Midway between stands man, wrought upon by both and conquering his way up with conscience as the means of ascent, — conquering slowly until he shall attain that perfection which is so self-secure that it requires no weapon of defense.

This spontaneous spiritual impulse is superior to the calculating obligations of conscience. Put it to the practical proof. The man who is good from cold conscience-driven duty is commendable. He who is good from warm spontaneous impulse is lovable. Ponder the meaning in Lowell's "Vision of Sir Launfal." It is the rich abun-

dance of the impulsive quality in Shelley which makes us look up to him as a superior nature, which causes one of his harshest critics to call him "a beautiful angel." And Shelley's essential nature is beautiful — like the Venus of Milos. The Venus of Milos has a moral code different from ours; so had the "Cor Cordium" of Shelley. Yet we recognize in each a beauty that supersedes our ephemeral moral standards and that reveals a closer kinship than we possess with the divine.

The progress of civilization exhibits man passing out of the brute and rising by conquering the higher life with a conscience; and rising still higher toward divinity, where the possession of the spontaneous spiritual impulse liberates him, more and more, from the exacting scrutiny of conscience. Take an illustration. In primeval times the brute instinct of man was to kill a stranger. Ethics educated him and imposed duties. Nowadays we grant a stranger life and accord him rights. And often we do more than that: we give him a hearty welcome. This does not come from conscience-driven obligation, but from the spontaneous feeling of brotherhood. The imperative duty has been transformed into joy. When, in the millennium, virtue has become

in all men an irrepressible impulse, ethics will cease to be an important factor in life. The triune division of philosophy into the true, the beautiful and the good will be reduced to two. And when ultimate truth shall be manifest, it will be dissolved in beauty. Then truth will be beauty and beauty truth, and that will be all men know or need to know.

"Taste," says Ruskin, "is not only a part and index of morality; it is the only morality." This is the doctrine of Keats. He would regulate life by æsthetic taste. Shelley believed that men could be controlled by the persuasiveness of reason. And in his most characteristic poem, the "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty," he conceived of the divine unseen power as an "awful loveliness" of *mind*. Keats went still further in his metaphysics. He subordinated intellect — it lacked personality — and conceived of this power as pure loveliness.

XXVI

FANNY BRAWNE

THE story of Keats as a poet draws toward the close. In "Otho the Great" he is the phrase-maker for a collaborator's ideas. In "The Cap and Bells," done after the physical collapse, a distracted mind is pathetically trying to smile and be merry. We shall neglect these and turn to the man as he passed into the throes of death.

The love for Fanny Brawne was one of the malign forces of fate. The printing of the Brawne letters aroused much protest. One man, at least, has refused to read them. Mr. Colvin omitted them from his collection. Matthew Arnold read and regretted their publication. Mr. Buxton Forman, foremost in laborious service for Keats, first printed them — for private circulation. "There is nothing," he says, "for any one to be afraid of." Certainly these letters add vividness to the tragic picture of the last days and reveal Keats' melancholy end as the operation of na-

ture's immutable laws. It is a debatable question whether a great poet has a right to domestic privacy, if that privacy is necessary for the full comprehension of his character. While we incline toward the conservative attitude, we believe the publication of these letters was justifiable. The gain for Keats is greater than the loss. Our sympathies are deepened and our understanding is quickened. Keats, the lover, is still the poet. He loved a woman as he loved his art. The defects of the lover are the virtues of his poetry.

Matthew Arnold has found in the Brawne letters material for special discredit to the writer's character. He quotes the ninth and says it is a sign of enervation, of lack of restraint; such as might be expected from a surgeon's apprentice in a breach of promise case. He brings this letter down to the level of cheap scandal.

Surely there are times when the literary critic should cast aside his academic robe and be simply human! And at no time is such generosity in better taste than when he is invading the privacy of the dead and reading love letters in cold type. If we do intrude upon Keats' love affair and sit in judgment, let us confine that judgment to matters of public concern. There are bounds

of jurisdiction for courts of law. Why not for literary criticism? Let literary criticism beware of the temptations of Peeping Tom. Let it read such letters as these, if it must, with deference and common humanity.

When Matthew Arnold quoted the ninth letter he detached it wholly from its vital atmosphere. He cited and judged it like one of his specimen passages of the "grand style." Love letters, so detached, may easily be made the subject of jest or censure. Now this ninth letter, it chances, came with the Roberts collection into the possession of Haverford College. And as we hold that human document in hand, look upon the page, revive in imagination the figure of Keats, the circumstances of the moment and the darkness that was closing around him, we cannot, with any decency, think of it as on the level of cheap scandal. The sheet is stainless, without blot or scratch. The handwriting is clear, regular, measured; it has the neatness of the copybook. Keats, when he wrote, was at his lodgings in College Street. He had just returned to London and his "hertè mine" after a long absence at Shanklin and Winchester, where, with steaming exhausting speed, he had written the tragedy of "Otho the Great." That work was done; he

was home again for relaxation and love. Note this. He was yielding to love in life just as he yielded to love in poetry. It was "an ardent listlessness," a luxury of enjoyment in repose. He was in one of those intense moods which we all applaud in his verse: —

> Now more than ever seems it rich to die;
> To cease upon the midnight with no pain.

Visualize this situation.

"You have absorbed me," he writes. "I have a sensation at the present moment as though I was dissolving. I should be miserable without the hope of soon seeing you." Just at this instant the door opens — a letter is handed to him — he opens and reads — it is from Miss Brawne. She is aware that love is a torment to him and suggests that he would be happier if they did not often see each other. Immediately from his tingling emotion comes the absolute protest. "Your note came in here," he continues. "I cannot be happier away from you. 'T is richer than an Argosy of Pearls. Do not threat me even in jest. I have been astonished that men have died martyrs for religion. . . . I could be martyred for my religion. Love is my religion — I could die for that. I could die for you."

"All for Love: or the World Well Lost"! Is

been astonished that Men
I have shuddered at th-
martyrd for any Religion
die for that. I could die
you are its only test. Yo
a Power I cannot resist
saw you; and ever
endeavoured often "to rea
I can do that no more
My Love is selfish. I ca

could die Martyrs for religion -
I shudder no more I could die
- Love is my religion - I could
for you. My Creed is Love and
u have vanish'd me away by
?; and yet I could write till I
ice I have seen you I have
ion against the reasons of my Love"
- the pain would be too great -
must breathe without you.

Yours for ever

John Keats

not the title of Dryden's play the best comment on this letter? Keats, for the time, is totally absorbed in one emotion. His unusual susceptibility makes it as keen as that sensation, later, of feeling the flowers grow over his grave. How many women — we appeal to the women — would regard that absorption in love as indicative of lack of character? Yet the censor declares it is a sign of enervation. Enervation means impotence; incapacity for doing one's work. But contemporaneously with this "enervating" love affair, Keats writes much of his best poetry. Has the sea-gull, after long beating against the winds, no right to rest on the enjoyment of its wings? And if it does, is that a sign of enervation?

The censor says that this letter shows lack of restraint. Who is to determine the measure of a lover's restraint — his betrothed or his literary diagnosticians? Here, doubtless, Miss Brawne should have precedence over the professional specialist. She was not ashamed of that fervor. She preserved those letters and bequeathed them to posterity. That love must therefore have had her sanction. It seems to us that, in sitting in judgment on this point, the gifted critic of the Barbarians, Philistines and Populace has passed beyond the proper jurisdiction of his court. This

is a private, not a public concern. Moreover, he has acted like an advocate for the prosecution. For what does he say of the restraint — that mania for reticence — which made Keats secrete his love affairs so rigorously from his friends? Severn even tells us he was unaware that Keats' last agonies were due to love.

The censor refers this letter to a surgeon's apprentice and a breach of promise case. And to what would he refer the "Vita Nuova" of Dante? Dante fell into "so frail and feeble" a condition over Beatrice that his friends asked him what was "wasting" his life. He bathed the earth with bitter tears. He lapsed into "distraction like a person in frenzy." The author of the "Vita Nuova" wrote: "Ofttimes love assailed me with such force that *naught remained alive in me* save one thought which spake of my lady." There is a difference of style, to be sure. Dante wrote with finished formal art for the public. Keats, little suspecting that an apostle of "high seriousness" would ever scan his words, wrote these artless outpourings from his heart for two hallowed eyes only. The experience, however, is precisely the same, the complete submission of the mind to love. It robbed neither poet of his capacity for doing his work.

If we observe the rule of decency for a dead man's love letters, Arnold's contention must shift to this: that Keats had no right to feel such intense emotion for a woman. He can indulge his raptures in poetry, —

> Ethereal, flushed, and like a throbbing star —

we will praise him for these; but when it comes to real life he must observe the proprieties as laid down by the excellent Sir Charles Grandison. Keats must divorce the emotions of poetry from the emotions of life, else we shall call him a surgeon's apprentice and file his letters in a breach of promise case. Such, indeed, is the *reductio ad absurdum* of the critic of the academic gown. Keats' love for Fanny Brawne has its defects; they are not on the level of cheap scandal.[1]

Keats was all poet; these letters are the final proof. The same current of imaginative creation which flowed into his poetry now enters his personal life. He is face to face with a woman whose attraction is fraught with dire possibili-

[1] "This morning before breakfast I went to the English burying-ground by the pyramid of Cestius and saw the graves of Shelley and Keats, and — what interested me more — that of Goethe's only son." *Letters of Matthew Arnold*, i, 321.

ties. At first the artist stands off and studies her with analytic eyes. Hitherto the roaring of the wind has been his wife, the stars his children; the idea of beauty in the abstract has suppressed the domestic cravings of the natural man. He has forsworn earthly love for poetry. Then the fateful moment comes; a daughter of Eve appears in the guise of a "minx." The celibate artist is repelled, attracted and puzzled. "Shall I give you Miss Brawne?" he writes his brother George. "She is about my height — with a fine style of countenance of the lengthened sort — she wants sentiment in every feature — she manages to make her hair look well — her nostrils are fine — though

a little painful — her mouth is bad and good — her Profile is better than her full face which indeed is not full, but pale and thin without showing any bone. Her shape is very graceful and so are her movements — her arms are good — her hands baddish — her feet tolerable. She is not seventeen — but she is ignorant — monstrous in her behavior, flying out in all directions, calling people such names that I was forced lately to make use of the term Minx — this I think not from any innate vice but from a penchant she has for acting stylishly — I am however tired of such style and shall decline any more of it."

Fatal delusion! While the eyes are scrutinizing and the will is holding him aloof, some indefinable power in the feminine strikes into his imagination; something flashes up, tyrannizes, yields, returns in full power, and ultimately dominates like an obsession. Struggle for release as he may, with the artist's instinct for self-preservation, he is, when not finding a refuge in poetry, a vassal of enchantment. Here is a notable instance of beauty drawing by a single hair.

It fluctuates, this power of fascination. If we watch the changes, we shall see the sincerity, the almost brutal sincerity of these letters. By the summer of 1819 he was already betrothed. On

August 23 of that year he wrote to Taylor, his publisher: "I equally dislike the favor of the public with the love of a woman. They are both cloying treacle to the wings of Independence." An astonishing thing for a betrothed lover to write! It would seem at first sight a case of rank treason. Now compare these words with the letter he had previously written in the same week to Miss Brawne and you will probe the mystery of this attachment. He is at Winchester, with the phantoms of "Otho" surging hot in the brain.

My dear Girl, — What shall I say for myself? I have been here four days and not written you. . . . Believe in the first letters I wrote you: I assure you I felt as I wrote. *I could not write so now.* The thousand images I have had pass through my brain — my uneasy spirits — my unguessed fate — are spread as a veil between me and you. Remember I have had no idle leisure to brood over you. I would fain, as my sails are set, sail on for a Brace of months longer — I am in complete cue — in the fever; and shall in these four months do an immense deal. This page as my eye skims over it I see is excessively unloverlike and ungallant. I cannot help it. . . .

My mind is heaped to the full; stuffed like a cricket ball — if I strive to fill it more it would burst. I know the generality of women would hate me for this; that I should have so unsoftened, so hard a mind as to forget them; forget the brightest realities for the dull imaginations of my own Brain. But I conjure you to give it a fair thinking; and ask yourself *if it is not better to explain my feelings to you than write artificial passion.*

The defects of the lover are the virtues of his poetry. He is all poet. This love is born wholly of the imagination. Its ardors are quenched by the creative activity of the artist. If we examine closer we shall find that this love is devoid of the instincts of natural affection. It brings pain as well as joy. It seeks to avoid its object. Keats went up to London, stayed there four days and returned to Winchester without seeing her. He seems to shun the accompaniments of marriage. "I tremble at domestic ties," he writes her. "God forbid that we should settle — turn into a pond — a stagnant Lethe — a vile crescent, row, or buildings. . . . Go out and wither at tea parties; freeze at dinners; bake at dances; simmer at routs." Those traits which enable a woman

to be a helpmeet make no impression on his consciousness. Those attractions which develop from the interplay of two mated natures are all reduced to one. "Why may I not speak of your Beauty, since without that I never could have lov'd you? I cannot conceive any beginning of such love as I have for you but Beauty." In these letters there is little or no homage to the minor graces which make the wife —

> A Creature not too bright or good
> For human nature's daily food.

Excepting the last sonnet, we usually think of this love as directly provocative of no real poetry. There is an "Ode to Fanny," some "Lines to Fanny," a "Sonnet to Fanny," — all three of no artistic value. They phrase the darker broodings of the letters, — the jealousy, the pestering suspicions, the moods of despair. In these by-products of his imagination he yearns for the early days when his fancy was free. He pictures his present condition in the metaphor of a hateful land, the dungeoner of his friends; a land of wrecked lives, where the winds are icy, the meadows barren and the birds do not sing. He cries to Love for mercy and proclaims himself a wretched thrall. If one makes a composite of this imagery, it is almost impossible to restrain

the belief that he dissolved these personal experiences in some detached mood and brought them forth again, crystallized, in that ballad which all critics agree is beyond criticism. The essential elements are the same. "La Belle Dame sans Merci," hitherto regarded as an isolated trifle, so perfect that it is no longer a trifle, is thus seen to be an autobiographical revelation, concealed by art, of this victim of love. It is the epitome of Keats' own enchantment.[1]

The artist, not the man, was in love with Fanny Brawne. Those qualities of companionableness which made him so welcome among his friends were not brought into play by her. He actually had to shun her to preserve his poise. The fascination came from the illusion of the imagination which saw in a commonplace girl its own mind-made image of beauty. This is not love in our human sense. It is a psychic fever in the guise of a sublime all-demanding passion. Those outcries of agony, those accesses of jealousy, those struggles to escape, those reactions of devotion, those wild dithyrambic avowals of absolute vassalage, — what are they but the concentrated

[1] It is possible that the ballad was written prior to the three personal poems. The parallel of imagery is none the less striking.

energies of his poetic life calling for a passion in response equal to his own? It could not be given. The deep was calling unto the shallows. The object of worship was an ordinary woman, — tender, perverse, worldly. Her heart was content with the pleasures of the passing day. Her lover's demands had the hunger of all time and space. He lived in the presence of the eternities. Marriage for them on earth — let us not contemplate that calamity.

Poetry was an antidote for this psychic fever. When Keats, finally shattered in health, could write no more, the fever was free to consume. In one way he was a victim of the universal law of compensation. Nature declares, "You may burn your fires, but you must pay the price for the burning." No profounder truth about the danger of genius was ever uttered than that by Dean Swift: "When a man's imagination gets astride of his reason, all is over with him." Keats forsook the path of the golden mean. He neglected to cultivate the faculties that bring intellectual balance. He reduced life to one principle. Forgetful of the nemesis that lurks in the abnormal, he let his imagination run loose, and it did get astride of his reason. He was young. He was growing slowly into wisdom. Then this unfor-

tunate passion for a woman came, then disease, and then—the end.

As one thinks of him now, with the fatal fire of imagination in the brain and the fatal fire of consumption in the blood, dwelling yet a little longer in the deepening gloom of hope and unquenchable ambition; as one beholds him, suffering, struggling, reaching out for love, while the shadows gather and the gloom darkens into night, his figure begins to command the terrible pathos of King Lear in the storm; and as love bends over him, pale and lurid in that blackness, with love's eagerness to save, one stands aghast at the implacable irony of his fate. Not love! "O, that way madness lies."

XXVII

INVALID DAYS

THURSDAY, February 3, 1820! It was one of those days of thaw and treacherous weather. Keats left his home in Hampstead without his overcoat. He rode to London on the outside of the stage-coach. Late that night he came home flushed and fevered. Brown, with whom he was living, at Wentworth Place, advised him to go to bed at once. When he entered the bedroom a little later with medicine, Keats was coughing and slipping into the sheets. "That is blood from my mouth," he said. "Bring me the candle, Brown, and let me see that blood." In the flickering light he examined the spots on the sheet. He was a graduate in medicine. "I know that blood," he announced. "It is arterial blood. I cannot be deceived in that color. That drop of blood is my death warrant. I must die." The instantaneous reaction of a man's mind in a crisis which takes him unawares is one of the best tests

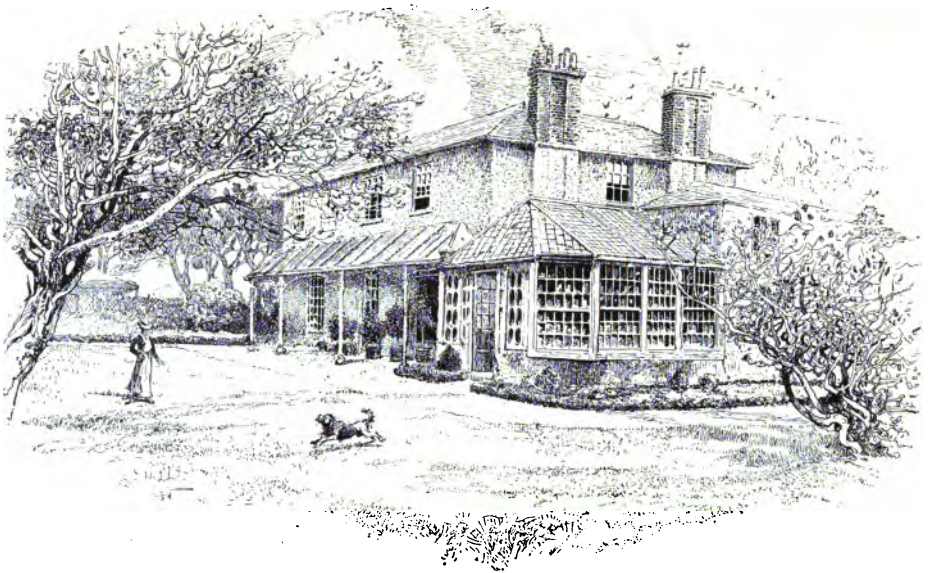
of character. Brown, who held the candle, said that Keats looked up into his face with a *calmness* that he could never forget.

His mother had died of consumption and so had his brother Tom. But George and his young sister were free of the taint. The illness of the Scotch tour had given Keats a warning. This second outbreak of the malady was the sign that he had received the fatal inheritance.

All that follows is the story of an invalid, calling for medical and not critical judgment. Although his hectic imagination is a torment, it does not continually rave and rend. At times love seems a partial solace. There are many incidents touchingly human in the record; often a display of fine graciousness of nature. The cheerful letters which Keats writes to his sister; the admonitions to his friends to wear warm wraps; the notes sent in to Miss Brawne, who lived in the adjoining house, — these lighten the atmosphere with idyllic charm. A sofa bed is made for him in the front parlor, so that he may escape the monotony of four posts and curtains upstairs. Through the window he looks out on the landscape of the Heath, longing for spring sunshine. He watches the passers-by: the French aristocrat in exile, the clock-mender, the gypsies,

the workingwomen in red cloaks, the two elderly maidens with their lap-dog, fearful of Brawne's Carlo. The doctors have told him that his trouble is only nervous irritability and general weakness; they have prescribed tangents, squares and angles as a sedative for his mind. But his thoughts dwell, preferably, on green fields and flowers — English wild-flowers. His hope lives on the song of a thrush as a promise of warm weather and better health. "There's that thrush again — I can't afford it — he'll run me up a pretty Bill for Music."

The event of each day is the visit of his betrothed. It has to be short in order to avoid an overstimulus to his nerves. He has to speak low, for he suffers palpitations of the heart. Sometimes he asks her to wait until nightfall, so that he may enjoy the prolonged anticipation as well as the reality. Always the poet, spiritualizing his pleasures. When she is not there, he watches her walking on the lawn, or waits for the stage that brings her from town, or follows her vanishing figure over the Heath, his heart full of admiration. No, there is nothing to be afraid of in these love letters. All we need to do is to put each in its vital setting and think of Keats as we think of our own loved ones, suffering on beds of pain.



WENTWORTH PLACE

Keats' last residence in England

How touching is his plea "to be pampered with tenderness"! How natural the twinge of pain when, in one of her notes, she inadvertently fails to call him "Love"! How unforgettable the incident when he has smeared a page of Brown's Ben Jonson with currant jelly and tries to lick off the stain and can't tell whether it remains purple or blue and so compromises on "Purplue"! How lover-like is his daily request that she send him his "good-night" on a scrap of paper, and how exquisite the bliss of the lover as he slips the paper under his pillow! And this sentence, — we must hold it in mind for the last hours, — "If I should die, I have left no immortal work behind me — nothing to make my friends proud of my memory — but I have lov'd the principle of Beauty in all things and if I had had time I would have made myself remembered."

Spring brought strength and partial recovery. He took a long walk. He went to the exhibition of Haydon's "Entry into Jerusalem." Brown, believing the crisis was past, rented his house and started for another tour in Scotland. Keats bade him farewell at Gravesend — it was forever — and went into lodgings in Kentish Town. Here on the twenty-second of June he had a violent

attack of hemorrhages and broke a blood vessel. Leigh Hunt found him helpless and took him into his home at Mortimer Terrace.

For a while now the details would be wholly depressing, if there were not a certain grandeur in the spectacle of genius battling against the vampire whose insidious influence was passing from the blood into the brain. The man was beaten—beaten down. Paralyzed with despair he would look for hours from Hunt's window toward Hampstead. His nerves gave way. He burst into floods of tears. His mind became a prey to fixed impressions. He grew suspicious of his best friends. The symptoms are well known in psychopathy. The Brawne letters of this period may be properly judged only by an alienist. To the layman it might seem that the lover had developed into a petulant savage. The imagination begins to rave and rend in darkness. Brown is thought of as an enemy. Those who surround Keats are regarded as inquisitors and tattlers, seeking to do him injury. He thinks of his betrothed as one whose heart is fastened on the world. He accuses her of flirting, begrudges the smiles she gives to others, and makes a morbid demand of her for absolute sacrifice. "You must be mine to die upon the rack if I want you. . . .

For God's sake save me — or tell me my passion is of too awful a nature for you." Is it not ironical and significant that the only picture we have of this girl is a black silhouette?

With these torments appears another symptom, — misanthropy and contempt for the brutal world. Her ring on his finger is no talisman. "I wish you could infuse a little confidence of human nature into my heart. I cannot muster any — the world is too brutal for me — I am glad there is such a thing as the grave — I am sure I shall never have any rest till I get there. . . . I wish I were either in your arms full of faith or that a Thunderbolt would strike me." The distemper comes to a climax when a letter from Miss Brawne, through a servant's negligence, is delivered two days late with a broken seal. In a storm of anger he leaves Hunt's house. Keats is no longer himself. The riotous imagination, now wholly beyond control, is straining to loosen his moorings to a human world and to drag him, perforce, toward the boundaries of *Mater Tenebrarum.*

Mrs. Brawne took the fugitive into her home and nursed him. Already, knowing his plight, Keats had offered to release Fanny from the engagement. This freedom, be it said to her eternal

ITY
OF
ALIFORNIA

credit, she promptly refused. The care of mother and daughter quieted him somewhat and exorcised the distemper. But his condition was still wretched. The presence of a stranger gave him a choking sensation. He could not write a note without a tightening of the chest. Meanwhile things were happening in the world to his advantage. The third volume appeared and was fairly well received. Jeffrey published an appreciative criticism of "Endymion" in the "Edinburgh Review." It was too late. Keats was too far gone to be cheered by such things. Haydon's pen sketch from this time is very vivid. He found him "lying in a white bed with white quilt and white sheets; the only color visible was the hectic flush of his cheeks." The doctors, convinced now that another winter in England would bring certain death, ordered him to Italy. Keats prepared to go — "as a soldier marches up to a battery." Word was sent to Brown, who hastened home. Shelley's invitation, urging Keats to come to Pisa, was declined. The plan was to put the invalid under the charge of Dr. Clark at Rome. Severn, a young artist, offered to go as companion. Severn — let every lover of Keats pause and consecrate a moment of silence to his memory.

They sailed from London on September 18.

As the ship went down the Thames, it passed, unawares, the boat that was bringing Brown from Scotland. Contrary winds in the English Channel delayed the voyage many days. Several times the passengers were set ashore for a ramble. After one of these landings — it was off the coast of Dorsetshire — Keats wrote his last lines of verse. In a moment of artistic power he phrased those two paradoxical yearnings upon which, during the previous months, he had brooded with such fluctuating intensity of desire — Love and Death. This last sonnet is one of the perfect swan-songs of literature.

Bright star, would I were stedfast as thou art!
  Not in lone splendor hung aloft the night,
And watching, with eternal lids apart,
  Like nature's patient, sleepless Eremite,
The moving waters at their priest-like task
  Of pure ablution round earth's human shores,
Or gazing on the new soft-fallen mask
  Of snow upon the mountains and the moors:
No — yet still stedfast, still unchangeable,
  Pillow'd upon my fair love's ripening breast,
To feel for ever its soft fall and swell,
  Awake forever in a sweet unrest,
Still, still to hear her tender-taken breath
And so live ever — or else swoon to death.

XXVIII

IN ROME

As he sailed away the phantom of love found a freer privilege to haunt and torment the imagination. He thinks of death as a decree of absolute divorce. Yet there is a chivalrous thoughtfulness in the parting messages. From Yarmouth, ten days after leaving London, he wrote Brown, "You think she has many faults — but for my sake think she has not one." He cherishes no hope of return, though desire burns with an intensity increasing with the distance. Already he is overwhelmed with the sense of a great darkness coming over him, and in this he sees "her figure eternally vanishing." In this gloom his hope flutters and craves, with blind eyes, a life beyond.

The voyage had its adventures. After the two weeks of slow sailing and anchoring along the English coast, the vessel had to drive through a hard storm for three days in the Bay of Biscay.

SPANISH STAIRS IN ROME

Keats' house on the right

Off the Peninsula it was held up by a Portuguese man-of-war and searched. It was visited by the officers of an English cruiser and promised satisfaction for the indignity. Then came the imposing view of Gibraltar at daybreak. Keats watched the rock in impressive silence while Severn sketched it in colors. The rest of the passage was over smooth waters. At the end of six weeks they reached Naples. Keats first saw the harbor in the rising sun, — the islands, the white city, the vineyard slopes, Vesuvius smoking grimly in the radiance of ethereal sky.

Ill luck pursues him; the ship is quarantined. The stifling air of the cabin increases his WRETCHEDNESS — he writes the word large in a letter and then, overcome by the exertion, is unable to finish. There is another consumptive aboard; her haggard face is ever before him like an ironical spectre. Those in health about him deepen his feeling of detachment from life. Yet he struggles to retain his human interests. To "Toots," the little sister-in-law — never to be — he sends report of the luscious grapes brought in the fruit boats; to her brother he gives an account of the great catches of miniature fish. The sublimity of the scenery — a partial compensation for the quarantine — stirs an undercurrent of enthu-

siasm, but he is too feeble to give it expression.

Severn records that Keats' face had worn "a starved haunting expression." He was so reticent about his anguish that his comrade did not suspect the real cause. A letter to Mrs. Brawne, from shipboard, is restrained, cheerful, though it breaks nobly at the close. "O, what a misery it is to have an intellect in splints." He no longer feels he is in the world. Naples appears as a dream. There are references to precious keepsakes: a knife, a pocketbook, a locket of hair. To the mother's letter he adds a quiet heartrending postscript: "Good-by, Fanny. God bless you."

Naples was in a political uproar. Keats found nothing to awaken his interest. Another letter to Brown, sent from here, shows his stoical resolution and his utter despair. "I will endeavor to bear my miseries patiently. . . . I can bear to die — I cannot bear to leave her. Oh, God! God! God!" He sends his blessing to all at home and again the injunction, "My dear Brown, for my sake, be her advocate forever."

They traveled to Rome in a carriage, progressing slowly, stopping at bad inns and eating bad food. The carriage was loaded with wild-flowers, gathered by the wayside. The approach to Rome

was across the Campagna; the entrance by the Lateran gate. As they drove through the streets Keats caught a glimpse of the Coliseum — the only one. Dr. Clark had taken lodgings for them opposite his own residence in the Piazza di Spagna. There they settled down for the struggle.

About this spot cluster the closing memories. From the fountains by the house the Spanish Stairs ascend to the church of the Holy Trinity, where, nowadays, the little wards of the convent sing so dolefully the Sunday vespers. From here the way goes past the inclosed Villa Medici to the Pincian Hill. In old Roman days on this hill Lucullus built his gardens and Messalina indulged in her orgies. Napoleon had recently constructed the grand promenade. It was along this that Keats took his last walks on earth. At the far end he looked down on the broad Piazza del Popolo, the Egyptian obelisk and the northern gate — the gate through which Luther entered the Holy City. Across the Tiber the Vatican and Michelangelo's dome on St. Peter's loomed above the gray confusion of buildings. Except for these distant prospects and the Borghese Galleries, he saw little of the glories of Rome. The doctor forbade the excitement. On the promenade the

Princess Borghese — but that is a bit of scandal that does not concern Keats. The English officer who walked with him was the cynosure of her eyes.

For a time he appeared to improve. He studied Italian and began to conceive new literary projects. Dr. Clark, diagnosing his case as only a slight affection of the lungs, prescribed short easy rides on horseback. The letter to Brown, however, written at the end of November, the last letter of all, is filled with quiet resignation. Keats feels that he is leading merely a posthumous existence. There is a faint smile on his face as he closes, and the tinge of humor thrusts the pathos home. "Write to George as soon as you see this, and tell him how I am as far as you are able to guess; and also a note to my sister — who walks about my imagination like a ghost. She is so like poor Tom. I can scarcely bid you good-by, even in a letter. *I always made an awkward bow.* God bless you." These are his last words on paper.

On the tenth of December the hemorrhages broke again. He lost blood by cupfuls. The attack was followed by fierce fever and more hemorrhages. The succeeding weeks are only a prolonged distress — without hope. Financial straits harass the two expatriates. Severn is nurse, cook,

ROME FROM THE PINCIAN HILL

and servant, day and night, week after week. The doctor comes four and five times daily. The patient's food is reduced to one anchovy, a morsel of bread or a pint of milk. There is a slight rally in January and a walk on the Pincio —the flutter of the lamp before the darkness. Again the hemorrhages and the copious losses of blood. Keats yearns for music. A piano is brought in and Severn plays the symphonies of Haydn, while the doomed one fingers continually his precious love token — that white oval carnelian. "Touch," he once said, thinking of her, "has a memory."

His mind is lucid. He feels bitterly the burden and the strain on his friend. For his sake he wishes death to come speedily. Sometimes there are outbursts of petulance at Severn's patient uncomplaining devotion. The nerves are riotous. He begs for forgiveness. Then comes a period of great calmness. The nerves are exhausted, impotent. "He remains quiet and submissive under his heavy fate," records the nurse. Keats repeats to him that thought of infinite regret which he had expressed so finely months before: "If I should die, I have left no immortal work behind me — nothing to make my friends proud of my memory, but I have lov'd the principle of Beauty

in all things, and if I had had time, I would have made myself remembered." It was during this period of "great quietness and peace," on the fourteenth of February, that the dying man, whose humility had always been conspicuous in his self-estimate, believing he was leaving only a few fragments, and these of no repute, asked that his name should not be put upon his tomb. He requested the simple epitaph, —

Here lies one whose name was writ in water, —

a wish which attests the great divide, in his own mind, between his paltry performance and his ambitious designs. Long before he had declared, "I had rather fail than not be among the greatest."

Toward the close he lost all desire of recovery. Already in spirit he had passed beyond the bourne, and he thought of the grave as a rest upon which he would gladly enter. Severn's visit to the cemetery and the account of the profusion of violets there brought him deep joy. He gave the last instructions. A letter from his betrothed, unopened, was to be wrapped in the winding sheet above his heart. Then the inaudible bell began to toll softly. "Poor Keats has me ever by him and shadows out the form of one solitary friend; he opens his eyes in great doubt and hor-

ror, but when they fall on me, they close gently, open quietly and close again till he sinks to sleep."

It was a death without the clergy. There was no anointing with oil; no laying on of apostolic hands; only Jeremy Taylor's "Holy Living and Holy Dying" and Severn praying by the bedside. The lonely vigils of the death watch, day after day, night after night — for he lingered on — brought the faithful overstrained comrade to the verge of collapse. Yet he held up until the end.

And the last hours, the two, hand in hand — but no alien pen has a privilege here. Four days later Severn, utterly prostrated, managed to scrawl a few tremulous lines — an unfinished letter to Brown that was never sent — and to sketch on the sheet, as a relief — art's relief for tragic realities — the symbolic figure of his own inexpressible grief.

"He is gone. He died with the greatest ease. He seemed to go to sleep. On Friday the 23rd, at half-past four the approach of death came on. 'Severn — I — lift me up, for I am dying. I shall die easy. Don't be frightened! Thank God it has come.' I lifted him up in my arms and the phlegm seemed boiling in his throat. This increased until eleven at night, when he gradually

sank into death, so quiet that I still thought he slept — but I cannot say more now. I am broken down beyond my strength, I cannot be left alone. I have not slept for nine days, I will say the days since— On Saturday a gentleman came to cast the face, hand and foot. On Sunday the body was opened; the lungs were completely gone, the doctors could not conceive how he had lived in the last two months. Dr. Clark will write you on this head—"

XXIX

POSTHUMOUS FAME

The champaign with its endless fleece
Of feathery grasses everywhere!
Silence and passion, joy and peace,
An everlasting wash of air —
Rome's ghost since her decease.

THE Protestant Cemetery is on the edge of the Campagna. For nineteen centuries the gray pyramid of Cestius has guarded the spot. St. Paul passed it by on his way to martyrdom. Here Keats lies in the shadow of the pagan tomb. It is pleasant to think that the ashes of Shelley lie close beside him. For Shelley only, of all the contemporaries, delivered the judgment that came in the fullness of time. The "Adonais" is prophecy come literally true.

The first reception of this elegy shows that even death could not mollify the enemy. "Blackwood's" parodied the "Adonais" in an "Elegy on a Tomcat." It asserted that a hundred thousand such verses could be easily written, and

granted the poem only five readable lines. When the news came of Shelley's own tragic end, the fact that he had the last volume by Keats in his pocket was made the occasion for more ribaldry. "What a rash man Shelley was to put to sea in a frail boat with Jack's poetry on board! Why, man, it would sink a trireme. I lay a wager that it righted soon after ejecting Jack." Christopher North was just as merciless in his "Noctes Ambrosianæ." In 1822, shortly after Keats' death, he published a doggerel sonnet in Italian addressed to Hunt and him. Keats was bantered as Don Giovanni d' Endymioni, il gran poeta d' Ipecachuanha and un gran Giacasso. Twenty years later the "Blackwood's" hostility died down with a querulous apology. It never intended, it said, to hurt Keats' lungs. It asked contemptuously if, when reviewing, the printer's proofs must first be read to a poet while a physician, with thumb on his pulse, indicates how much criticism he can endure. Some of the wits made merry over the grave. Severn relates that often in Rome he heard English travelers utter jibes about the epitaph. "Here lies one whose name was writ in water," they said, "and his poetry in milk and water." He adds that pitiful account of his showing Keats' picture to the old broken

Scott and of Scott's distress at the sight of it. "Yes, yes," muttered the conscience-stricken Sir Walter, turning hastily away, "the world finds out these things for itself at last."[1]

Of course the fiction that Keats' death was due to brutal criticism caused some reaction in his favor. Shelley's indignation in "Adonais," Byron's persiflage, that unauthorized addition to the epitaph have done much to establish the tradition that the poet died reviling the reviews. As late as 1860 George Eliot believed it. She wrote from Rome of the tomb, "It is painful to look upon, because of the inscription on the stone, which seems to make him still speak in bitterness from his grave." The tradition is not yet wholly dispelled from the popular mind. But all the good it can do has been done, and it should be cleared away, once and for all, in justice to the truth and Keats' self-reliance. Brown was responsible for the addition. It was his own resentment which supplied the false interpretation to Keats' dying request. He acknowledged the mistake. "Swayed by a natural feeling I advised more," he wrote in 1836 to Severn. "I have long repented of my fault and must repeat what I said to you in Rome, 'I hope the government will

[1] Cf. p. 97.

permit the erasure of every word except those words to which he himself limited his epitaph.'" The erasure has never been made. As long as the addition remains, it will misrepresent the man and the true circumstances of his death. Keats died of hereditary consumption; the autopsy was definitive proof of that. Doubtless his voracious imagination, with no hope to feed upon, weakened his resisting powers and hastened the end. The effect of the reviews was so remote and insignificant as to be altogether negligible. Severn testifies that Keats never once mentioned the "Blackwood's" attacks.

For a decade his good repute was confined to a few friends and casual readers. Those who had the material to write a biography and defend his character were embroiled with each other and delayed publication. Miss Brawne, it is reported, said that the kindest act his friends could do would be to let him rest in oblivion. His notoriety, however, did not die away. In the political quarrels of the magazines his case was a pretext for charges and recriminations. Though unhonored, his name was not forgotten.

In 1829, very unexpectedly to his friends, Galignani in Paris reprinted his poems with a memoir. English visitors in Rome — those were

GRAVE OF KEATS

the years of "Young England" and Reform — began to hunt up Severn and inquire about the graves of Shelley and Keats. When Severn went to England in 1838 he found some considerable interest in Keats, an increasing interest. In 1840 there was issued a collected edition of his works. Two more soon followed. In 1848 Richard Monckton Milnes, a man of social prestige, though not yet Lord Houghton, published "The Life and Letters of John Keats." This book first lifted the dead poet into distinction and set his character aright before the world. A paragraph from the first edition (omitted in the second) sketches the Keats myth as it then existed in the popular fancy.

"I perceived," said Milnes, "that many who heartily admired his poetry looked on it as the production of a wayward and erratic genius, self-indulgent in conceits, disrespectful of rules and limitations of art, not only unlearned but careless of knowledge, not only exaggerated but despising proportion. I knew that his moral disposition was assumed to be weak, gluttonous of sensual excitement, querulous of severe judgment, fantastic in tastes and lackadaisical in its sentiments. He was all but universally believed to have been killed by a stupid savage article in

a review, and to a compassion generated by an untoward fate, he was held to owe a certain personal interest which his poetic reputation hardly justified."

With such false impressions to correct, Milnes wisely decided that a conventional biography, by an advocate, would be unconvincing. Therefore he simply published the documentary evidence; the letters, the testimony of associates; the poems; these interlarded with his own comments and criticisms.

It did its work most effectively. The increase of attention to Keats during the next few years was very gratifying. In 1849 Samuel Phillips reviewed the "Life" in the London "Times" and reprinted the article. In 1852 the Earl of Belfast associated Keats with Moore and Scott in a public lecture. In 1853 Keats was included in "The Lives of the Illustrious." That same year De Quincey's essay was published and Jeffrey's review of "Endymion" was reprinted. There are numerous magazine articles about this time. In 1857 Keats found due recognition in the Encyclopædia Britannica, an assurance of dignity for the future.

For a long time the "Life and Letters" remained the authentic source-book of information

about the poet. A revised edition was issued by Lord Houghton in 1867. This biography has been supplemented by the work of later scholars with ampler materials at command. Of these Mr. Buxton Forman and Mr. Sidney Colvin are the foremost in laborious service. A legion of critical essays have been written during the past generation, among which three are worth special distinction. Lowell's gives the best insight into the peculiar quality of Keats' genius; Aubrey De Vere's the best interpretation of his type of mind; Matthew Arnold's the sanction of a great critic (sometimes capricious) to his eminence in the natural magic of poetry. Ruskin's tribute, nevertheless, is greater than all others: "I have come to that pass of admiration for him now that I dare not read him, so discontented he makes me with my own work."

The day of debate is passed. Keats has won his place and is as likely to keep it as any other English poet of the century. For his work is wholly independent of the little systems that have their day and cease to be. Tennyson, so secure in the homage of his own generation, is not so sure as Keats for those to come. Great contemporary vogue is a sinister gift of fortune, often illusive. Keats survived without a vogue,—an

evidence of intrinsic value detached from time. He feeds a permanent hunger in human nature; and even though socialism should be the destiny of the race, the hunger for beauty would still remain.

Keats' possible performance, if he had lived, is a fascinating topic for speculation. One man declares he had run his course; another that he had just begun. Under the stress of enthusiasm it is easy to speculate rashly, to predict a rival for Shakespeare. He had, as Arnold stated, the Shakespearean faculty for natural magic. He might have vied with him in copious wealth of imagery. But that he ever could have measured with him in length and breadth and depth of substance is wholly improbable. Keats was a genius with a strong instinctive bias. When such a bias persists, strengthens and perfects itself, as it did with Keats, it is unlikely ever to develop into the free adaptability of the all-inclusive nature. If Keats had acquired wisdom, it would have been dyed by an intense individual temperament. He would still have viewed the world from a fixed point of view. A shift from this would have resulted in a loss of power. Recollect his drama and his satire. The mind that sees life large was not his portion. Let him dwell in his own temple

of delight; not Shakespeare's hurly-burly. He may become a universal poet; he could never have become a poet of the universal. His type of genius is minor, profound, permanent.

In the quantitative sense, by his early death the world lost much exalting enjoyment — the unwritten poems. Nevertheless the man revealed himself; delivered his message; left fulfillment to his followers. He was a germinal mind. A genius, after all, can only fling off fragments of himself. Socrates did no more; nor, relatively speaking, did Michelangelo. Posterity lacks the treatise on knowledge and the majestic tomb of a pope. It has the stature of the men — the dynamic impulses of their spirits. We have lost, perhaps, the pleasure of a completed epic or two; we have not lost Keats. The archetype of the man is forever ours.

> The soul of Adonais like a star
> Beacons from the abode where the eternal are.

The absolute critic has the schoolmaster's zeal for gradations and place. Mindful of the rebuke of the Master when the disciples were disputing about rank in the kingdom of heaven, the lover of Keats will spare him the contentions of absolute criticism. The disparity between performance and promise should grant him exemption.

Let us hold him in memory as he held himself on earth — in isolation.

The Keats that Hunt and Brown and Severn knew was a gifted young man who jested, drank claret, cut cards for half guineas, accompanied them to the theatre. Usually he was gracious and sweet-tempered, sometimes tempestuous. Occasionally he went off by himself and wrote verses. He died early, deeply mourned, and passed into oblivion. To them he was very real. Keats can never be so real to us. He is far too vital for such physical reality. His figure is set in a mystical haze, luminous in the flooding light of his fame. He stands somewhere in remote space delivering oracular messages of beauty; an intermediary between us and the invisible beyond. Through him we get faint hints of the mysterious agencies at work behind the veil. The powers have been at play around him; the eternal powers and the forces of evil — momentarily victorious —that seek to foil and destroy. But here evil has been vanquished and the beneficent agencies have emerged in triumph to justify our faltering faith that the truth, crushed to earth, shall arise, and that the power of truth shall deliver judgment and justice even at the end of the world.

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